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HISTORY
of the
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

by the
REV^d HENRY STEBBING, M.A. &c.

Vol. I

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*The miserable father visited the Prison at night
fall and again besought Perpetua to recant.*

An Account of Perpetua's Martyrdom.

London.

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AND JOHN TAYLOR, UPPER GOWER STREET,
1833.

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TABLE,

ANALYTICAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL,

TO THE FIRST VOLUME OF THE

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HISTORY

OF

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

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CHAPTER I.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH. — ITS EXTENSION. — LABOURS OF ST. PAUL. — FIRST PERSECUTION. — RUIN OF THE JEWS. — STATE OF THE CHRISTIANS AFTER THE REIGN OF NERO.

WE regard the history of the Christian church as properly commencing with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The language of Scripture is strikingly distinct in the introduction to the wonderful narrative of this event; and the great founder of the evangelical kingdom is seen writing down the era, and preparing the solemnities, for the consecration of the living temple. "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." The members of the infant church were thus gathered together by a common hope; they were soon to be bound to each other by the communion of one spirit. They had till this hour possessed no other tie but baptism into the same faith, the feelings which had been inspired by the sight of the same miracles, the affection which a fellowship in danger and contumely instils, or the love which they all felt for the meek and crucified Saviour; and it is likely that this tie would have kept them together through all persecutions and afflictions,

till they had been cut off, one after the other, by the sword of violence ; but, so far, it was formed of human thoughts and principles—the strongest, it is true, that ever bound men together, but still human ; and the Son of God would not let the first stone of his temple be laid on earthly foundations. “ They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” * This was the founding and establishment of the church of Christ. The living stones of the temple had been prepared ; this built them up. They had been gathered together out of the quarry ; this formed them into the indestructible house of God. To the strength of human love was added the illumination of the Spirit ; to the light of human reason were added its softening and purifying graces.

The chosen members of the new communion were thus formed into one body, essentially distinguished from the world. A sign was written upon them which could not be counterfeited. A circle was described around them which could not be broken. They were before objects of wonder for the miraculous powers they were seen to exercise ; but now they were still more so, for they had been made the subjects of one great and particularising dispensation. They could not be confounded with the rest of men ; they could not be lost sight of by the flowing in of the multitude. There they stood, bowing under the same mighty awe ; shadowed by the same encircling glory.

The church having been set up, its heavenly Founder, as if to show this its distinctness from the world, ordered it so that great numbers of people should assemble to wonder at its glory ; and, as if, moreover, to give an assurance of its future universality, he summoned representatives of all nations of the earth to witness its establishment. “ Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which

* Acts of the Apostles, ch. ii.

speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?"

Such is the grand spectacle which the history of the church of Christ presents at its commencement; and none can be more fitted to awaken a long train of solemn recollections. We may meet with others, in our progress down the stream of time, more filled with splendid accompaniments, more calculated for description, and better adapted to rouse the passions; but we shall find nothing in the whole narrative more suited to inspire veneration and confidence towards God. The divine economy is shown to us under a new light. The Almighty Father, if it had been his will, might have effected the designs he had in view, by the sole exercise of his providence. He might have set up his church, and, instead of endowing its members with the strength and graces of his spirit, have left it weak and comfortless; bringing to pass his own purpose by a separate act of his power. By making kings bow at his command, by forcing the events of all ages to aid its immediate enlargement; by making, in short, his providence the only safeguard of the church, it would still have been established according to his will. But he chose to glorify his mercy. He endowed the church of his redeemed people with light and strength, whereby it might contend with its enemies. He gave it to have light in itself, and to spread and enlarge by the quickening of the divine energy with which he first established it.

The church, of which the foundation was thus laid, consisted of the twelve apostles, the seventy disciples

who had followed Christ at an early period of his ministry, and the few who had since been converted, either by his own preaching or by that of his messengers. No sooner, however, had St. Peter demonstrated to the multitude, that the miraculous effusion of the Holy Spirit was in conformity with the predictions of the old prophets, than 3000 persons acknowledged themselves convinced by what had taken place, and gladly accepted baptism. The circumstances under which the little community found itself were of the most remarkable kind. New hopes and new duties had suddenly supplied the place of all the customary objects of thought. Another world was disclosed to them, which threw a shadow over every thing present and temporal; and, while their own spirits were thus elevated above sublunary cares, they felt themselves inspired with an anxiety, till now unknown, for the improvement and delivery of their fellow-beings.

The immediate consequence of this state of mind was that ready charity and sacrifice of selfish feeling, which led the converts to offer whatever they possessed for the general use of their brethren. The next was a constant and fervent attendance on all the offices of devotion. Awe and wonder occupied every avenue of the mind. The apostles continued to enlarge the series of miracles begun by their master; and the fear which came upon those who witnessed them, was connected with the holy confidence which led them to celebrate the new rites of the faith with praises to God, and with gladness and singleness of heart.

The preaching and miracles of the apostles, on the one side, and the active zeal and charity of the disciples, on the other, led to the daily increase of the church; and especially on one occasion, when Peter and John addressed about 5000 persons with exhortations to repentance, not less successful than energetic.* But this rapid augmentation of the believers both alarmed

* Acts, iv.

and enraged the Jews; and the influential orders united in determining upon measures for the suppression of the sect. Peter and John were accordingly apprehended, and kept for one night in prison. This, however, was only productive of fresh manifestations of the divine authority whereby they spoke; for the next day, on being set free, they returned to their companions, and, the whole company praying with great devotion, another effusion of the Holy Spirit was granted, and the power and zeal of the disciples received a further accession of strength.* The converts thus newly made were as ready to bestow their possessions on the community to which they had become united as their predecessors; but, even at this early period, hypocrisy and falsehood began to appear among the professors of Christ's religion, and the death of Ananias and Sapphira proclaimed to the members of the infant church the heavy penalty which would be enacted for such sins against the Holy Ghost.

Soon after this event the apostles were again cast into prison; but being, during the night, miraculously delivered, they were the next day found, by the priests, teaching, according to their custom, in the temple. In conformity with the counsel of Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, and a man whose reputation among the people was considerable, the rulers, after inflicting a slight punishment, were induced to dismiss them, and they immediately resumed the exercise of their functions.

The increase which had taken place in the number of the converts, and, consequently, in that of the claimants on the charity of the wealthy, as well as in the sums at the disposal of the apostles, rendered it necessary that proper persons should be appointed to superintend the equable distribution of the alms. This was the more requisite, as some jealousy had arisen, on the part of those who were strangers in Jerusalem, respecting the superior favour which they supposed was bestowed on the poor of the city, in preference to others.

* Acts, v.

To prevent, therefore, the possibility of disorders, seven prudent and pious men were chosen, in whom both parties could place the utmost confidence. Of these the devout Stephen rendered himself the most conspicuous by his labours among the people, and the miracles he wrought for their conviction. He was not long allowed to exercise his zeal uninterrupted. Having provoked the rancour of certain foreign Jews, by the power with which he argued against their errors, they arraigned him for blasphemy before the tribunal of the high priest, and, his eloquent defence only serving to increase their rage, he was thrust out of the city, and stoned to death as a blasphemer.*

The vindictive passions of the persecutors appear to have received a sudden accession of strength on the occurrence of this event; for the sacred historian of the Acts expressly records, that at that time there was a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem, and that the members of it, with the exception of the apostles, who thereby appear to have been resolved upon encountering every peril that might occur, were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. As will be found to have been the case with the later persecutions, this early trial of the church was productive of important benefits. Philip, one of the deacons, emulating the zeal of the martyred Stephen, preached in Samaria with such success that the people gave heed to him with one accord, while even a sorcerer who had obtained great reputation in the city by his magical arts, acknowledged himself convinced by the miracles of the preacher, and received baptism, with those whom he had been employed in deceiving.† Another remarkable conversion, the fruit of the same teacher's united zeal and devotion, was that of the Ethiopian eunuch, after baptizing whom Philip proceeded from Azotus, whither he appears to have been miraculously carried, and preached in a variety of cities,

* Acts, vi. vii.

† Ibid. viii.

till he came to Cesarea, where we find, from a passage in the latter part of St. Luke's history, that he remained stationed for many years.

In the mean while, another most efficient minister was added to the church, in the person of Saul of Tarsus*, a young man distinguished for his ardent devotion to the religion in which he had been brought up, and highly accomplished in all the learning of his age and country. The first mention made of him in the apostolic history occurs in the narrative of saint Stephen's martyrdom, where he is described as taking charge of the garments belonging to the persons who stoned the innocent sufferer to death. Whatever, therefore, were the natural endowments of his mind, or the advantages he had derived from his learned education, it is evident that the fervour of youth, and a blind zeal for the religion of his fathers, had hitherto prevented his employing those strong reasoning powers which characterise the productions of his pen. He was too honest, too elevated in his character as a man, to have persecuted the followers of Christ from the same motives as those which instigated the Scribes and Pharisees in general. The violence, consequently, which he allowed himself to commit, is to be attributed chiefly to his ignorance of the religion which he sought to exterminate; and ignorance, in such characters as his, usually begets prejudices of the most obstinate kind. Bold, passionate, and enthusiastic, he saw nothing but the glory of Israel, as it had been represented to him in the teachings of his rabbinical masters; and, in the hurry and ardour with which he sought to promote the cause of his people, he had no time to consider the claims of the innovators to his attention. Like the rest of the Jews, he did not regard an apparent alteration in the laws or operations of nature as a necessary or incontrovertible proof of the divine presence. With the same readiness as the most virulent and uninformed of his countrymen, he could answer the argument of Christ's miracles with "he

* Acts, ix.

casteth out devils through the prince of the devils." To one who was too impatient to perform the duty of enquiring on what grounds he acted, this was a sufficient reply to the observation, that it had never before been "so seen in Israel;" and to the other evidences of the divinity of Christ, the same zeal and impatience were a still more effectual blind. The purest morality of sentiment and action can obtain no credit when it is supposed to be employed only as an instrument of deception; and though Saul could not but have admired the precepts which Jesus taught, nothing was easier for him, in the prejudiced state of mind under which he acted, than to ascribe their delivery to a wrong motive. In the same manner, the charity, the self-denying meekness, and other virtues of the Saviour, so conspicuous to those who viewed them without prejudice, would lose all merit in the eyes of one who regarded him who practised them as a false pretender to divine authority. Saul started with this belief in the allegation of the rulers that Christ was an impostor; to this he referred whatever was told him respecting either his actions or his sayings; and being neither of an age nor a temperament to sit down and quietly examine the matter, he at once embraced the side of the persecutors, and began a career of which the termination was as unforeseen as it was strange.

In almost every remarkable proceeding of divine Providence, we may not merely discover the value and importance of the design, but may delight ourselves with contemplating a visible fitness in the means by which it is effected. None of the other apostles were miraculously converted to the faith; there was nothing, it would seem, in their situation or personal characters to render an extraordinary display of the divine presence necessary to their conviction. They were men of simple manners, ingenuous minds; poor, unlearned, and unambitious. Their reason had not been blinded by sophistry, they had little to do with the rulers of their nation, and they were far more likely to have the simple sense of the an-

cient Scriptures deeply impressed on their minds, than the wealthier or more erudite of their countrymen. With men of this character the doctrines of Christ would operate powerfully and effectually: his miracles would carry conviction to their minds that he taught with authority; and the unprejudiced view they took of his actions, character, and discourse, compared with what they had read in the prophets, would satisfy them, without a particular miracle, wrought for their private conviction, that he was indeed the Messiah. Saul was differently circumstanced; was of a different character; and, considering his situation, and the dispositions by which he was actuated, there seems little reason to suppose that he would ever have given heed to the evidence which convinced those who were apostles before him. His conversion, therefore, was miraculous, because it was necessary that it should be so. At the same time, the solemnity of the circumstances which attended the event was in the highest degree fitted to prefigure the triumphs by which it was to be followed. It was right that he, who had been chosen to bear the name of the Redeemer, not only to the children of Israel, but before nations and their kings, should be inaugurated with extraordinary solemnity. The light which had shone from heaven when the Messiah was born, might well be looked for again when he was consecrating the first of his messengers to the world at large; and the stern but affecting appeal made at once to his soul and his reason, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard to kick against the pricks," was a fitting address to one whose commission would oblige him to contend with the most powerful of adversaries, who would often have to rouse the indifferent and oppose the perverse by sudden displays of divine authority, or the voice of indignant rebuke or pathetic persuasion.*

The conversion of Saul preceded that of the first Gentile convert, Cornelius †, whose divinely authorised admission into the church was the earliest intimation the

* Acts, ix.

† Ibid. x.

apostles received, that the religion of Christ, with all its benefits, was intended for mankind at large. It was to St. Peter that the vision was granted, which thus widened, to an unlimited extent, the boundaries of the Christian church; an honour which we might have supposed would have been vouchsafed to the newly ordained apostle, whose office it so especially was to labour in the Gentile world. But Saul had not yet sufficient authority in the church to fit him for making known a doctrine at first sight so startling to Jewish prejudices. A proposition to admit the Gentiles into communion with the faithful, coming from him, might have rendered him an object of lasting suspicion to many; whereas the respect in which Peter was held enabled that apostle to publish the commands he had received, without any fear of their being controverted by the most suspicious even of his associates.

A most important change was produced in the appearance of the new community by the breaking down of the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles. The stream of divine mercy was then let loose to flow unrestrainedly through the world; the star in the East became a sun, to enlighten the whole earth; and the law of righteousness, to secure its universality, was to be written on the hearts of men in every quarter of the globe. With this enlargement of the field over which the doctrines of Christ were to be diffused, an explanation was given of the true character of his religion, and of some of his precepts, the full force of which could scarcely have been previously comprehended. It required the operation of the Holy Spirit to lead his disciples into all truth; it was equally required to fill them with the comprehensive grace of charity. They had their possessions in common immediately after the first effusion of the day of Pentecost; and the most conspicuous sign which they gave of the change which had taken place in their views and dispositions was the influence of this most benign and social virtue on their actions. But we do not find that they had formed any

idea of communicating the blessings they enjoyed to Gentiles, till a direct and positive command was given them to that end ; nor was it till after Peter had seen an extraordinary vision, and had the object of it distinctly placed before him by the address of the devout Cornelius, that he exclaimed, “ Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”

Every year thus brought some increase to the church, and tended to fix more firmly the doctrines of Christ in the minds of those who had received them. But, though thus prospering, through the aid of its Almighty Protector, it was not permitted by its enemies to flourish without severe trials. Herod Agrippa, whom the Roman emperor had placed in the government of Judea, desirous of securing his popularity with the Jews, commenced a persecution of the faithful, in which one of the first victims was James the brother of John. From the manner in which the mention of the persecution is introduced by the sacred historian, it appears to have been chiefly intended to cut off the leaders of the community; and we accordingly find, that no sooner had James been put to death than Peter was apprehended and cast into prison, where he was to have been kept till some popular festival should afford occasion for his public execution. His miraculous delivery, and the awful death of the persecuting prince, were new proofs of the care with which God watched over the concerns of his people.*

The increase, however, in the numbers of the converts, and more especially the admission of Gentiles into the church, gave rise to questions which threatened for a time the disturbance of its internal tranquillity. Saul, having most effectually commenced his arduous labours, was, at the period of which we are speaking, preaching with his companion Barnabas at Antioch. It was in this city that the followers of our Lord were

* Acts, xii. Josephus, *Antiq.*, lib. xvii. c. 6. s. 5.

first called Christians*, and so important a station was it considered, that Barnabas, and Saul (who, in the course of an extensive journey over the neighbouring territory, had adopted the name of Paul), deemed it the most proper place in which to establish their residence. But while they were there, some persons arrived from Jerusalem, whose object it was to promulgate the doctrine that the Gentiles ought not to be admitted into the church without having previously submitted to the rite of circumcision. So serious were the dissensions created by this anti-evangelical attempt, that Paul and Barnabas, with others engaged in the controversy, found it necessary to go to Jerusalem, in order to consult with the other apostles and principal members of the church.

On the arrival of the deputies from the congregation of Antioch at Jerusalem, the apostles and elders immediately assembled, and entered on the solemn consideration of the question so important in all respects to the character of the community. This, it appears, was the first occasion in which a general meeting of the faithful had been summoned, and it is sometimes placed at the head of the list of those councils which make so conspicuous a figure in the history of the Christian church. The dispute was determined in a manner befitting the wisdom and the spirit with which the apostles uniformly acted; and the Gentiles were declared to be thenceforth free to enter the community of the faithful, whenever they felt themselves ready to obey, from their hearts, the law of the Gospel. It is not unworthy of remark, that St. Peter, who had acted so conspicuous a part in the introduction of the Gentiles, was the first to address the assembly; and that he called the attention of his brethren to the circumstance, that God elected him especially to proclaim the Gospel to the heathen. Paul and Barnabas confirmed his observations, by recounting

* The primitive Christians received various other appellations, and it is said were originally called Jessians: their enemies termed them Nazarenes and Galileans. — *Bingham, Origines Ecclesiast.*, book i.

the miracles which they had been enabled to perform for the same purpose; while St. James, the president or bishop of the church at Jerusalem, after showing that God had from the beginning intended the calling in of the Gentiles, closed the deliberations by proposing that their new converts should be left wholly unburdened by the Mosaic law, and that epistles should be addressed to them respecting the particular rules they would be called upon to obey.*

From this period the scene presented for our contemplation becomes continually more varied and extensive. Paul and Barnabas had already preached the Gospel with distinguished success at Seleucia and at Salamis, in the island of Cyprus, in Pisidia, Pamphylia, and Lycaonia. On leaving Jerusalem, they returned, in company with Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, to Antioch, and soon after determined on revisiting the various churches which they had planted in their preceding journeys.† A slight difference, however, occurred between them respecting the propriety of taking Mark, who it appears had left them while they were travelling in Pamphylia; and the contention ended with Paul's resolving to pursue the route of Syria and Cilicia with Silas for his associate, while Barnabas proceeded in company with Mark to Cyprus.‡

In the course of this journey the indefatigable apostle of the Gentiles visited Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, and Macedonia, whither he was sent by a divine command given him in a vision while in the city of Troas. Nearly the whole of Asia Minor was made acquainted with, and to a considerable extent received, the Gospel. At Philippi and Thessalonica churches were formed, which, though they cost the preachers much labour and suffering in their establishment, were regarded by them as

* Basnage observes, in speaking of this assembly, that Baronius is probably the only author who has stated that our Lord held councils with his disciples; one on matters of faith, another on discipline. — *L'Hist. de l'Eglise*, lib. x. c. i. p. 492. s. 1.

† Acts, xiv.

‡ Ibid. xv.

the noblest evidences of the power of the Spirit, and the surest seal of their apostleship.

The success which attended his labours in Macedonia encouraged St. Paul to extend his journey into Achaia *, the capital of which had so long been the nurse of philosophy and the arts ; and which, though now deprived of much of its ancient splendour, was still the favourite resort of learned and inquisitive scholars from every quarter of the globe. Paul had been highly educated, and was of all the apostles the best qualified, in a human point of view, for publishing the doctrines of the Gospel at a place like Athens. But too much stress ought not to be laid upon the circumstance of his learning and accomplishments ; since a little consideration will convince us that the advantage he might thence derive bore no proportion to the difficulties with which he had to contend. His youth had been spent at the feet of Gamaliel, a man of learning no doubt, but one who had, it appears, taken greater pains to imbue the mind of his pupil with rabbinical knowledge and pharisaic superstitions, than to quicken or enlarge it by the general study of science and philosophy. The first act in which we see him engaged was that of a zealot, an act befitting the favourite pupil of a Jewish doctor ; and we find that, for some time after, he was chiefly occupied in performing the will of his bigoted and persecuting superiors. However powerful, therefore, his mind might naturally be, and however carefully it had been cultivated, he had reached manhood without acquiring any of those profound and enlarged views of either nature or religion, which might fit him for reasoning with success in the midst of men who were accustomed to regard the faith he professed as made up of uncharitable, superstitious severities. We cannot for a moment suppose, that, had he visited Athens previously to his conversion, his learning would have enabled him to attract the bold, acute freethinkers of Greece to reason

* Acts, vii.

and meditate on his opinions. The accomplishments and advantages, therefore, which he had derived from his education, ought not to be regarded, as they commonly are, of such prime importance to the success of his mission in Greece ; for, if we may form an opinion of the state of his mind from his actions in the early period of his career, we are bound, we see, to confess that his learning had contributed little to the enlightenment of his understanding, or the real enlargement of his reason : while, on reading his addresses, or his epistles, we cannot fail of perceiving that the grandeur of thought, and the noble, elevated spirit of charity which fill them with all the affecting beauty of the most genuine eloquence, spring direct from the knowledge and the feelings he had acquired since he became a Christian. It was to these, in fact, that he owed the strength with which he entered the arena ; it was these which gave him respectability in the eyes of scholars and philosophers, and not the learning he had acquired from his human tutors. Had that been his trust, whatever might be his talents, the men of Athens were not of a character to attend to one whose zeal was of so blinding a nature as to make him a persecutor ; and though his discourse might have gained him a momentary attention by its vehemence, he would have been listened to with disdain, and would have gained neither converts nor admirers.

But supposing that St. Paul had enjoyed the advantages of an education less confined, or less leavened by the fierce spirit of prejudice which prevailed among his countrymen, still the situation in which he stood at Athens would have presented difficulties in the highest degree discouraging to any unassisted efforts. His learning would naturally provoke the opposition of those who prided themselves on their erudition ; his novel doctrines would be regarded, perhaps, as curious, by those who loved novelty, but they wanted the authority of well-known names to recommend them ; and when he asserted that he required for his opinions a place in the innermost hearts of those who heard them ; that

they were of infinitely greater value than any that had ever been promulgated by the profoundest philosopher ; and that the fruits they produced, wherever fairly planted, were a wisdom and a happiness hitherto unknown to the world, his audience would naturally listen to him with a wondering and satiric incredulity, and censure him as much for his arrogance as they applauded him for his eloquence. It is to the power, therefore, with which he was endued from on high, that we can alone rationally ascribe his success. He had not been made a philosopher ; and it was only by his having been a most skilful logician, that he could have stood forth with the mere human instruments of his warfare, and found the slightest chance of success. But he had the mighty minister of truth on his side. A force was given to the words he spoke, which sent them straight through the labyrinth of men's hearts to their consciences ; and he was heard with attention, because his reasoning and doctrines were clothed with a brightness that outshone the purest light of philosophy, and possessed an interest which the loftiest intellects had been incapable of giving to the fairest of their inventions.

From Athens Paul proceeded to Corinth *, a city little inferior in reputation to the former. His preaching there was attended with numerous conversions. Ephesus, Cæsarea and Antioch, were next visited in succession ; after which he traversed the whole district of Galatia and Phrygia. He continued thus to travel, diffusing the Gospel over an immense extent of country, till he went up to Jerusalem for the fifth time since his conversion ; when those circumstances occurred which induced him to appeal for justice to the emperor, and led to his being carried a prisoner to Rome.†

Much less is known respecting the labours of the other apostles, and their associates, in preaching the Gospel.‡ St. Andrew, however, is said to have made known its truths among the Scythians, and to have sub-

* Acts, xviii.

† Ibid, xxii.

‡ Mosheim, *De Rebus Christ. ante Constant. cap. i. sect. 15.*

sequently taught in Epirus and Greece. St. Mark established the church of Alexandria. St. John proceeded into Asia Minor, and took up his residence at Ephesus.* St. Thomas is recorded to have laboured among the Parthians and Indians, and St. Bartholomew among the Armenians. St. Jude had his province in Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Idumea; and St. Philip his in Upper Asia; while St. Simon the Canaanite traversed various parts of Persia and Mesopotamia, and St. Matthias the country of Æthiopia.†

St. Paul is supposed to have been liberated from his imprisonment at Rome in the year 63, but it is uncertain to what district he then directed his steps. Tradition mentions, that he visited both Spain and England, but not much faith is placed in this assertion by the more sober-minded of critics. The most credible opinion is, that he employed the liberty he enjoyed in revisiting the districts in which he had formerly laboured with such glorious success. But however this may be, it is well ascertained that he was scarcely absent from Rome more than two years, at the end of which period he appears to have been again labouring with his wonted zeal in that capital. St. Peter also, it is commonly believed, was there at the same time, after having diligently laboured among his Jewish brethren dispersed through the several districts named at the commencement of his first epistle.

We may perceive, even from the slight intimations which remain respecting the wide-extended labours of these first preachers of Christianity, that the seed of the gospel, in less than forty years after the ascension of its Divine Author, had been spread over the most important regions of the civilised world. St. Paul, some years before his exertions terminated, was able to say that he had preached from Jerusalem, round about into Illyricum,—a wide sphere through which to diffuse intelligence, but the extent of which appears still more im-

* Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* lib. iii. c. 23. *Ibid.* lib. iii. c. 18.

† Cave's *Lives of the Apostles.*

posing when it is recollected that within its circuit lay many of the wealthiest and the most highly polished cities of the world. There is no doubt but that the doctrines of the gospel had been heard also at Alexandria, a place which abounded alike in the riches of commerce and the long accumulated stores of learning; and which, by the extent of its population, the luxury and intelligence of its inhabitants, might almost be regarded as the rival of Rome. The mere mention of Parthians, Medes, Æthiopians, indefinitely as the names of those ancient people are employed in early writings, inspires us with a deep feeling of admiration for the courage and perseverance of the men whom various concurrent testimonies represent as proclaiming to them the truths of their faith. In all respects, the progress which the religion of Christ had thus rapidly made is worthy of being contemplated with the most fervent sentiments of gratitude; first towards Him who gave the strength and the light by which it was effected, and next towards those who so well obeyed his will. We have no particular relation of the several events which attended the exertions of the apostles or their associates in general; but the simple record of the circumstances under which they appeared among the people whom they addressed is sufficient to convince us, that the difficulties and dangers which they had to encounter could be neither slight nor of rare occurrence. To the Greeks their wisdom at first appeared foolishness; to the barbarians they would seem to be speaking of things as hard to be understood as they were incredible; and in both cases they would have to offend the prejudices of the people, to incur the dire resentment of priests and their dependents, to resist with simple truth and meek persuasion tumultuous assemblies, and find themselves sufferers from the sudden impressions of popular dislike, as well as from the secret machinations of their more interested opponents. Nor had they those means of lightening the toil of their undertaking which wealthier teachers would have possessed: they depended,

for the most part, on creating a tolerant or charitable feeling among those whom they visited ; food and shelter, therefore, it is probable, were not always to be obtained by the primitive missionaries of the gospel ; and the equally noble and pathetic exclamation of St. Paul, “ Every where, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry ; both to abound and to suffer need *,” was, doubtlessly, the frequently repeated sentiment of his fellow-labourers in the same calling.

But the hardships which awaited these self-denying men in their various journeyings were confined, for the most part, to themselves. No edicts had yet been passed to make the Christians amenable to public law : they were the objects of dislike to both Jews and heathens ; and the effects of this, though only an occasional exposure to danger, must have been a very frequent one to annoyance and abuse. Two only of the most active, even of those who were appointed to preach the gospel, had, according to historical testimony, perished by the sword. They fell, too, among the Jews, the most virulent of their enemies ; and thus it appears, that, by the providence of the great Ruler of the church, the labourers whom he had chosen to work in his vineyard were preserved, though not from danger, yet from death, till they had fairly planted it, while the rest of his people were saved from violent trials of their faith till they should become better prepared for its endurance.

The period, however, was now arrived when the restraint which had hitherto kept back the hand of power was to be removed ; and Nero, who had already disgraced himself by the commission of almost every crime that a human being can perpetrate, “ added,” says Eusebius, “ to his other titles of infamy, that of being the first of the emperors who deluged the church with blood.” † The number of Christians at Rome was considerable, and embraced several persons of opulence and distinction. That they were not originally regarded with any very strong feelings of enmity, may be conjectured

* Epist. to Philip. iv. 12.

† Hist. Eccles. lib. ii. c. 25.

from the circumstance of St. Paul's having been allowed to remain uninjured during his confinement, and being afterwards set free without punishment. Had either Nero or his courtiers conceived at that period much dislike towards the Christians, of whom he was the recognised teacher, this would scarcely have been the case. So little prejudice, in fact, had at first existed at Rome respecting the character of Christ and his followers, that it is related, that the emperor Tiberius, struck with even the imperfect accounts which he had received of our Saviour, proposed to the senate to have him enrolled among the gods whom the Romans worshipped.* Whatever may be the foundation of this story, it is sufficient to show that no such rancorous feeling originally existed in the breasts of the Roman magistrates as that which now began to display itself with so terrible a force. That things remained in this state till very near the breaking out of the first persecutions is also rendered highly probable, not only from the indulgent manner in which St. Paul was treated, but from the fact that there is no mention in his Epistle to the Romans, or in those which he wrote while at Rome to other churches, of any troubles brought on himself, or his brethren, through the interference of persons in authority. On the contrary, it deserves to be noticed, that there is more than one passage in his writings from which we may fairly suppose, that he had a high opinion of the justice and integrity of the magistrates; and that he thought there was little to fear for his converts, so far at least as persons in authority were concerned, and so long as they were careful and correct in their conduct. One of these passages occurs in the thirteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and certainly merits consideration. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers; for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves

* Eusebius, Hist. Eccles. lib. vii. c. 18. Mosheim, de Rebus ante Cons. sec. 22. Tertullian, Apol. c. v.

damnation : for rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power ? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same ; for he is the minister of God to thee for good," &c. It is scarcely to be supposed that St. Paul would have written the last two or three sentences to the Roman Christians, had he received any intelligence from them which could have led him to apprehend they were in danger of unjust treatment from the emperor or his ministers. In the Epistle to the Philippians, which was written during his captivity, and, it is generally supposed, towards its close, passages occur which imply that he was uncertain what would be his fate in his examination before the emperor, which was then, it is probable, near at hand. But its general tone, as respects the affairs of the Christian brotherhood, would not lead us to suppose that he feared the approach of any general persecution ; on the contrary, he informs the Philippians that there was an increase of zeal and boldness in the preachers of the gospel ; and, which deserves particular attention, that there were some who exercised the office, " even of envy and strife," contentiously, and not sincerely, — a circumstance not common in times when any peril is approaching, and when more evil than advantage is to be looked for by a pretended zeal for religion. At the end of this epistle also occurs that remarkable line, " All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Cæsar's household," — a hopeful testimony to the tolerance of the Roman court up to that period.

In comparing these epistles, which were written during St. Paul's first captivity at Rome, with the second Epistle to Timothy, which, it is generally allowed, was written in his second captivity in that city, few readers can fail of being struck with the difference between the style of these addresses. It is evident, from the tone of the latter, that the apostle saw troubles near at hand ; that the prospects of him and his brethren had undergone a considerable change since he formerly wrote, and

that evil men were "waxing worse and worse." From his desiring Timothy, however, to be with him before winter, and to bring Mark with him, we learn that the danger was not immediate or pressing. It is, therefore, probable, that the epistle was written at the period when the signs of persecution began to appear, but some short time before violence was actually committed. As there is no mention, moreover, of any of the brethren having been put to death, which he would hardly have omitted to record had such an event occurred, we have a further proof that the epistle was written before the general persecution by Nero; at the very commencement of which so many of the Christians suffered death as malefactors, and as the incendiaries of the city. Rome was set fire to in the year 64; and the emperor, it is well known, to clear himself of the odium which he suffered from being regarded as the author of that calamity, ascribed it to the Christians. Some time, however, must have elapsed before the reports of his guilt could have become so loud and general as to reach his ears; and still further time must have been expended before he could so arrange his wretched defence as to give it a fitting air of plausibility in the eyes of his people. Taking this into consideration, it is probable that the brethren were not violently assailed till somewhat more than a year after the conflagration occurred; which, if we receive the date usually affixed to this epistle, that is, the year 65, would allow of its having been written on the eve of the troubles, but before their actual occurrence.

But the point to which attention is more particularly invited, is the remarkable change which had evidently taken place, in a comparatively very short period, in the position of the Christians at Rome. Nero found it politic and expedient to fix the calumny of his guilt on them: but he would not have ventured to do so had he not had reason to believe that the public would easily give into the idea; nor would he have continued his barbarities to such an extent as he did, had he not had other motives for persecuting the innocent sufferers than the mere attempt to clear himself of sus-

picion. What had produced this great increase of enmity towards the Christians it is impossible precisely to determine. It is not unlikely, however, that the very increase in their numbers was one cause, for the more they multiplied and spread among the great mass of the people the more numerous would be the instances of opposition to the corrupt morals and practices of those among whom they lived ; and thus irritation and dislike would be diffused through many a private circle into the common mass of popular feeling. Equally probable is it, that Nero, sunk as he was in horrible licentiousness, might have more than once caught the sound of severe censures passed on his conduct by those who professed the pure and holy doctrines of the gospel. The very knowledge, even, that their whole system of belief and practice was based on principles that condemned such guilt as his to the severest punishments, must have naturally inclined him to receive with a favourable ear whatever slanders either his courtiers or the populace could invent against them ; and it is not impossible but that St. Paul, when he spoke of the evil men who were “ deceiving and being deceived,” might have expressly in view the emperor and his counsellors. But with the feelings of indignation, which so readily rise in the minds of tyrants when their vices are reproved even by hearsay, resolutions would be formed to stop the mouths of those who ventured on the dangerous task of rebuking imperial sins, and thus the Christian preachers were no doubt prohibited, some time before the breaking out of the persecution, from exercising their office with the liberty which became their calling. This would at once bring them into collision with the authority of the magistrates, and if they persevered in their usual course, their conduct would be interpreted into a flagitious and obstinate contempt of their rulers. The tolerant spirit with which they had at first been regarded, as it had had no proper foundation, would at once give way to these causes of dislike ; the better orders of society who re-

garded the common belief with sceptical levity would now join their hatred of the Christian morality to the popular hatred of Christian theology. Thus the believers would every day become more and more separated from the community in which they lived: they would begin to be regarded as low, unlicensed censurers; and in proportion as they found themselves obliged to retire more completely within the circle of their own society, to arm themselves with all those severe virtues necessary in great trials of fortitude, and to watch as men who had hourly to expect insult and suffering, they would be considered as more schismatical and gloomy in their notions; would be suspected of hatred towards the rest of mankind; and in a short time be believed guilty of all those vices to which such feelings lead, not only by the unthinking and prejudiced multitude, but by whoever had not the patience or the honesty to give their system and general character a fair examination.

There is no particular account of the persecution which the Roman people were thus prepared to see perpetrated by their infamous sovereign, in the ancient historians of the church. From Tertullian, however, we learn that it was not commenced without the formal sanction of certain laws which, according to that writer, were enacted against the Christians by Nero; and it has hence been supposed, with great appearance of probability, that the faithful not merely of Rome but of all the provinces shared in the calamity.* In confirmation of this idea, a celebrated Spanish inscription, in which Nero is praised for having "cleared Spain of the new superstition" is often cited; but its authenticity is now generally disputed.† Fortunately for the purposes of history, though little to the praise of those writers, we possess the undoubted remarks of more than one heathen author to prove the unjust manner in which the persecuted people were regarded. Tacitus,

* Mosheim de Reb. ante Cons. sec. 35. Tertullian de Præscriptione Heretic. c xxxvi.

† Mosheim, cent. 1. c. v. Eccies. Hist.

the acute, philosophic Tacitus, allowed himself, nor is he the only instance of a man of genius being deceived by popular prejudices, to fall into the common error respecting the Christians. According to him their religion was "a detestable superstition*;" and in describing its progress he is guilty of the inconsistency of allowing the extent of its conquests, and of condemning it without examining its dogmas. "It was at first suppressed," says he, "but afterwards broke out afresh, and spread not only through Judea, in which the evil had its origin, but also through the metropolis, the common sewer, in which whatever is noisome and flagitious is gathered together and increases." In speaking of those who were brought before the tribunals, he says, "that some confessed themselves Christians, and thereby led to the discovery and apprehension of several others;" and further, that "they were condemned not so much for the burning of Rome as for being the enemies of mankind."† Not less worthy of attention are the passages in which Seneca and Juvenal allude to the mode in which the unfortunate sufferers were put to death with a refinement of barbarity which almost exceeds belief. Nero directed his victims to be covered with wax, or other substances of the same kind, and having been thus carefully prepared, to be placed in conspicuous parts of the imperial gardens, with sharp stakes set under their chins to keep them in an upright position while they were burning, and make them serve as torches. As cruelty is seldom in want of devices, those who were not burnt or crucified were sewn up in the skins of wild beasts, and then exposed for the amusement of the spectators to be worried by dogs. Even the multitude who hated the Christians, and were passionately fond of spectacles, are said to have expressed disgust at the barbarity of the tyrant. But for three or four years he continued his oppressions without interruption, and would in all probability have

* "Superstitio exitiabilis," *Annal. lib. xv. c. xlv.*

† "Superstitio nova ac malefica" is the description given of it by Suetonius, *Vit. Nero.*

pursued them further, had he not been driven at the end of that period to terminate his existence, in order to avoid the punishment and disgrace which awaited him from his subjects. St. Peter and St. Paul, it is generally supposed, both perished in this persecution, the former by crucifixion, the latter on the block ; but no records remain to determine how many of the faithful were cut off, or whether the church suffered in other provinces of the empire as it did at Rome.*

The death of Nero, and the commotions with which it was attended, by drawing the attention of all classes of persons to the distracted condition of the state, preserved the Christians for a time from the calamities of which they had just experienced the bitter commencement. But while history is silent respecting them at this period, one of its chapters, the darkest to be found in its whole vast volume, is filled with a melancholy detail of the miseries which now burst like a torrent upon the reprobate and devoted Jews. Tidings of revolt had of late been brought by every messenger sent by the governors of Judea to Rome. The deeds and characters of those who fomented these troubles were of a different kind to those described in the official reports from other parts of the empire. The Romans had been long accustomed to hear of the fierce conflicts between their legions and the fiery spirits of the East ; but the narratives which described to them the conduct of the Jews were filled with incidents as gloomy and mysterious as they were indicative of deep and lasting hatred. Pride, gathering strength from calamities ill borne, had given birth to the wildest species of fanaticism ; and a real, overwhelming sense of coming desolation rendered the people as reckless as they were haughty and passionate. There was a something in the daring spirit of rebellion which they thus exhibited, and in their well-known pretensions to an inalienable superiority over the rest of the world, well calculated to rouse the pride of the Romans and their sovereign ;

* Eusebius, lib. ii. c. xxv.

and in addition, therefore, to the ordinary motives which would always lead them to chastise a refractory province, they had, in the case of Judea, many of a new and peculiar nature, and such as would impress them with a fixed determination to repress its insurrections.

Vespasian, with his son Titus, had been sent by Nero with a powerful army into Judea, in the year 66; and in the course of a few months all the chief places of Galilee were in the hands of the enemy.* But in proportion as the cloud which hung threatening over their nation grew darker, the unfortunate people became more and more the prey of internal disorders. A class of fanatics, who assumed the name of zealots, resisting the advice of the more prudent of their countrymen, took up arms with the professed resolution of opposing the further progress of the Romans. But they had scarcely assembled in sufficient numbers to appear formidable in their own eyes, when they began the work of pillage; and, marching to Jerusalem, took possession of the temple, and conducted themselves with all the insolence and barbarity of tyrants just possessed of power. The attempt which the high priest, Ananus, and others made to repress the fury of these abandoned men only gave rise to fresh and worse outrages. The zealots, finding themselves in danger, called in the Idumeans, by night, to their assistance; and a conflict took place in the very precincts of the temple, at the end of which between 8000 and 9000 persons lay slaughtered under its walls. Encouraged by their success in this attack, the Idumeans immediately proceeded to plunder the city, and slay the few persons of distinction who had not fallen in the previous conflict. The high priest, Ananias, the chief object of their hatred, was killed without delay. The observations which Josephus makes in recording this event are deserving attention. "I should not mistake," he remarks, "if I said that the death of Ananus was the beginning of the destruction of

* Josephus, De Bell. lib. iii. c. vii. x.

the city ; and that from this very day may be dated the overthrow of her walls, and the ruin of her affairs, when they saw their high priest, and the procurer of their preservation, slain in the midst of their city." After praising the great prudence of this person, and mentioning another, named Jesus, also highly distinguished for similar good qualities, he continues to remark ; "I cannot but think it was because God had doomed this city to destruction as a polluted city, and was resolved to purge his sanctuary by fire, that he cut off these their great defenders and wellwishers ; while those who a little before had worn the sacred garments, and had presided over the public worship, and been esteemed venerable by those that dwelt on the whole habitable earth, when they came into our city were cast out naked, and seen to be the food of dogs and wild beasts. And I cannot but imagine that virtue itself groaned at these men's cases, and lamented that she was here so terribly conquered by wickedness."*

The strongest expressions are chosen by the indignant historian to describe the horrible excesses to which the zealots proceeded after they had thus removed the few men who had sufficient courage and authority to stem for a while the torrent of their wickedness. Vespasian was persuaded by the chief officers of his army to proceed at once to Jerusalem, and strike the final blow while the people were in this state of confusion : but prudently observing, that a too hasty attack would only serve to re-unite the several parties, he contented himself with following up the cautious system with which he had commenced the campaign. In the midst, however, of his proceedings, intelligence was brought him of the death of Nero, which was followed by his own election to the imperial throne. As this obliged him to depart immediately for Rome, Titus was left in command of the army, which had shortly before been set in order for commencing its march to-

* De Bell. lib. iv. c. iii. iv.

wards the holy city. The perils which awaited them at this juncture had no other effect on the Jews than that of increasing the licentiousness which raged among them. Those who possessed some degree of prudence and fortitude were overpowered by the zealots on the one side, and by the despairing or too blindly courageous on the other. The enormities daily practised in the streets are too horrible for description, where the subject does not demand it; and when the Roman army took up its position against the devoted city, its population exhibited the melancholy spectacle of a people that seemed to have been simultaneously struck with frenzy. It does not come within our province to follow the course of the siege, or the almost inconceivable miseries endured by the inhabitants of Jerusalem during its continuance. But not a tittle of Christ's prophecy was left unfulfilled. War, plague, and famine were united to execute the judgments of the Almighty. On the 10th of August the temple was set on fire, and on the 8th of September Titus was master of the desolated city.*

In answer to the question, what became of the numerous Christians of Jerusalem during these calamitous events, we are informed that by a divine intimation, given shortly before their occurrence, to some of the most holy men among them, they were directed to leave the city, and take up their abode at Pella†, a small town on the other side of the river Jordan. There, it is reported, they continued till the emperor Hadrian built the town of Ælia, on the ancient site of Jerusalem‡, when they returned to that spot which so many recollections had rendered above all others sacred to the followers of Christ.

As no mention is made in history of its struggles during the intervening period, it may be supposed that till the latter end of the reign of Domitian the church was suffered to remain unmolested by any serious attack. Suspicion, however, was awake, and both Vespasian and

A.D.
95.

* Josephus, De Bell. lib. vi. c. ix. x. Eusebius, lib. iii. c. v.—ix.

† Eusebius, lib. iii. c. v.

‡ Ibid. lib. iv. c. vi.

Domitian, influenced by reports respecting the Messiah of the Jews, made diligent enquiry after all individuals of that nation who had any pretensions to the honour of a royal descent. The latter of these emperors had the opportunity, in the early part of his reign, of examining some persons who acknowledged themselves descended from David. They are commonly supposed to have been grandsons of Jude the apostle, but their poverty and the unaffected simplicity of their manners convinced Domitian that he had nothing to fear from their pretensions to royalty, and he dismissed them without injury.* Their answers, it is said, inspired him with the utmost contempt; and he is stated to have issued thereupon an order prohibiting the further persecution of the Christians. There is some contradiction in the statements of ancient authors on this point, but it is generally known that, not long after, the barbarities which disgraced the reign of Nero were renewed. Among those who fell in this persecution were many persons of distinction. At the head of the list stands Flavius Clemens, the cousin of Domitian, and whose two infant sons he had himself nominated his successors. Domitilla, the wife of Clement, and also a relation of the emperor, was banished to the Isle of Pandataria, while the niece of Clement was sent to the Isle of Pontia, and lodged in a dungeon.

Happily for the church, the reign of Domitian was at its close when he commenced this persecution of the faithful; and his successor Nerva, who ascended the throne in the year 96, was endowed with qualities both of mind and temper which strongly inclined him to the practice of tolerance. One of the first acts of his government was to rescind the edicts which his predecessor had published against the Christians. Those who had been condemned for any supposed religious offence were freed from punishment, and the exiles were restored to their homes. Among the latter was St. John, who had been banished to the Isle of Patmos, and now returned to end his long and useful course

* Eusebius, lib. iii. c. xix, xx.

among his brethren at Ephesus. General tranquillity was thus, for a season, granted to the church, and the first eventful century of its existence was closed in peace.

CHAP. II.

INSTITUTION OF RULES OF DISCIPLINE. — RITES OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH. — INTRODUCTION OF HERESIES. — WORKS OF THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS.

It is commonly the case with new societies that those who are concerned in their formation institute, at the beginning, a system of rules in order to secure exertion in the proper line of duty, and to impress a deep sense of the importance of the object which it is the purpose of their association to fulfil. This, however, is principally to be considered as the practice of societies formed for a well ascertained and definite purpose. When the object for which a set of persons unite together is less distinct and obvious than the principles, and the internal feeling which dispose them to unite, are strong, the society is for the most part left to depend, in the earlier period of its existence, on the fraternal sentiments, the uninfluenced sense of duty, or the enthusiasm of its members. But as none of these principles of union are unassailable by the world, associations, which have no other security for their permanence, are in most instances dissolved after a brief existence, or are lost to all practical purposes in the mass of general society.

In contemplating the union which existed from the first between the disciples of Christ, we see a society formed of men who were evidently drawn together more from community of sentiment, and reverence for the same master, than from the notion that they were to associate in order to labour as a body in

effecting a particular purpose. The feelings which thus brought them together were sufficient, both in their strength and nature, to keep those united who experienced them in their full and genuine force ; and supposing that it had been the design of Divine Providence to inspire all to whom the Gospel was offered with an immediate and fervent love of the system, the society which the first disciples of Christ formed among each other, would have extended with the propagation of his doctrine, and have been kept entire and active without the addition of any external rules. But the few chosen were to be of the many called ; and with the earliest enlargement of the infant church, the necessity would become apparent of watching the characters and conduct of those who entered its communion. The same circumstance would also render it necessary to institute regulations, respecting the mode and times in which they were to assemble, for the purposes of mutual instruction and social worship. From this foundation, namely, from the necessity of using great circumspection in admitting persons into the church as worthy of the Christian brotherhood, and of providing for the orderly arrangement of its proceedings, both internally and externally, rules would spring up from time to time, and the Christians would be formed into a society compacted together by outward ordinances as well as by community of spirit.

Baptism, as the sign of the new covenant, figured in the most striking manner the spiritual nature and object of the dispensation ; but from the very circumstance that Christ directed an outward rite to be performed as significant of their union with him, his followers might learn that the impulses, whether of the spirit or of natural feeling, were not to be regarded as the sole test of their union. Had the contrary been the case, the society of Christians would have been merely temporary and nominal ; and we accordingly find that, in the earliest meetings of the faithful, they indicated their communion and brotherhood in Christ by the breaking of bread together religiously. Thus bap-

tism, and the Communion, were established from the first as rites of the church, and for both these there was the authority of the Lord himself. They were necessary to typify the change which his religion, by its privileges and graces, was to effect in the heart; and to preserve the members of the church together as one sanctified body, nourished from the same divine source. But they were also sufficient for these purposes; and so clearly did the apostles consider them to be so, that there is no mention in Scripture of their having added to them any others. It was their practice, indeed, in admitting certain of their number to exercise the more important functions of teachers, to lay their hands upon them, and to pray; but praying was their common practice on all solemn occasions, and the laying on of hands was the general and long established mode of bestowing a blessing.

Thus, while the church was provided with useful and befitting ordinances, its sacred simplicity as a spiritual institution, as one which was to renovate men's hearts, not by external shows, but by the direct appeals of truth to their consciences, was for some years preserved uninjured by any vain attempt to increase its dignity by pomp and ceremony. That the apostles, however, and the principal persons associated with them, considered they had authority to institute measures for regulating the affairs of the church, appears from the account given of their proceedings immediately after the effusion of the Holy Spirit. The institution of the order of deacons was the work of their authority, founded on the evident want of such an order of men in the increasing community; while the council held at Jerusalem shows them publishing an ordinance of great importance, but at the same time deeming it necessary to consult with each other generally on the subject. It hence appears that none had yet either assumed to themselves, or received from their brethren, authority to act individually as rulers in the community. "It pleased the apostles and elders, *with the whole church,*"

to follow the advice of James: and it is evident that it was in the mystical and spiritual body of the church, that the chief power was believed to reside; for it is represented as subject to no one but Christ, of whom it is termed the fulness and the body. It is clear, however, that the administration of this power was deputed to the ministers in their several degrees, who had been set apart from the rest of the brethren for this object. St. Paul speaks of himself as endowed with an authority to exhort, rebuke, and direct individuals, and particular churches, in a manner which belonged to him in virtue of his office. The same is intimated in his address to Timothy respecting the different ministers of whom he speaks in his epistle; and though it is a matter of controversy with men of the greatest learning, whether the order of bishops existed as at present in the infant church, it is clear, by whatever name we call them, that as there were deacons and presbyters, so there were certain of the most distinguished teachers who presided over the faithful in different districts, and who were principally charged with their instruction.*

Of the mode in which the public service of the congregations was conducted we have no precise account; but from occasional intimations on the subject, we may gather that prayer and prophesying, — by which latter term, as used in the New Testament, preaching is to be generally understood, — formed the chief part of the service. The instructions which St. Paul gives to the church of Corinth, while it affords a very unfavourable view of the state of discipline among the professors of Christianity there, presents us with the remarkable picture of an assembly formed of persons, a large portion of whom were endowed with miraculous powers. From the directions of the apostle we may reasonably suppose, that the greatest confusion had prevailed at their meetings, and that this resulted from two causes: an abuse,

* The distinction between the laity and clergy is supported by numerous passages in the apostolic fathers. It has been stated, that it arose in the days of Tertullian and Cyprian; but Clemens Alexandrinus and Clemens Romanus both state the distinct ordination of the clergy.

in the first place, of that charitable principle by which the celebration of the communion of the Lord's Supper was converted into a feast for those who needed food ; and, in the second place, from the inconsiderate zeal, or the unholy vanity, with which many of those who were possessed of miraculous endowments sought to display their powers. To correct these errors, St. Paul strives to convince the Corinthians that the communion ought to be celebrated solely for the devout remembrance of their Lord, and thus to render it a pure and wholly religious rite. In regard to the disorders which occurred in the congregation from the improper display of the gift of tongues, he wisely argues, that the proper object of their assembling is the edification of all present ; and that for this purpose the gift of tongues should only be exercised, when it could be done consistently with order, and be rendered profitable to the hearers. From the allusions made by the apostle to other circumstances which had occurred among the converts, it is still further evident that Christianity had already begun to be professed by those who were unimpressed with the vital power of its doctrines. In giving his opinion on this subject, St. Paul plainly declares the necessity of establishing a system of discipline which should meet the evils that might be apprehended from the falling away of unconverted brethren. The chief object, indeed, of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, is to settle questions, and correct disorders, which it might almost be expected would arise in a church constituted like that of Corinth. It is, therefore, a portion of the New Testament Scriptures from which we are able to derive much valuable knowledge respecting the state of the Gentile congregations : and the sum of the information to be gathered from this and similar portions of the apostolic epistles is, that the general assemblies of the believers took place on the first day of the week ; that they then celebrated the communion, offered up prayers, listened to the exhortations of those who were qualified either by the particular inspiration of the Holy

Spirit, or by a recognised authority in the church, to address them ; displayed the signs which indicated their election to perform a certain portion in the common work of edification, and, lastly, contributed, as their means enabled them, to the collections which were necessary for the support of their brethren in other provinces.

But while it is evident, from the brief notices we possess of the state of discipline in these primitive churches, that it required all the wisdom and spiritual power of their guides to preserve them from confusion, it is equally well known, that while those who had received their commission from Christ himself, and the perfection of their knowledge from the Spirit of truth, were still upon the earth, divisions were fomented on points of doctrine, which threatened materially to affect the peace and prosperity of the church. The authors of these heresies were men of subtle, inquisitive minds, fond of disputation and theorising ; deceiving themselves, probably, into the belief that they were lovers of truth ; but too proud, self-trusting, and speculative, to receive the word of God, till they had given it a form corresponding to their preconceived notions of what it should be. It was chiefly from the ancient philosophy, or rather theology, of the East, that these disputatious sectaries derived their fundamental dogmas ; and the errors of the gnostics, the parent sect, were intermingled with the stream of divine truth almost the moment it left its source.

It was not, however, till the second century, that the heresies of which the seeds were thus early sown, began to assume a distinct form in opposition to the doctrines of the church. Independent of the disadvantages which a sectarian would feel while tampering with persons taught by the apostles, or their immediate followers, it was requisite for his purpose that the community in which he wished to labour should be composed of considerable numbers of persons, otherwise there could be little chance of his forming a party sufficiently strong to uphold his sentiments against those of the orthodox.

In proportion, therefore, to the increase of the church in the number of its members, the temptations were augmented which call forth the pride and energies of those who delight in controversy, and are ambitious of the distinctions which it sometimes bestows. But though it is to a later period than that which we are at present contemplating, that we must refer the rapid growth of heresy, it was sufficiently apparent, even in this century, to create serious uneasiness in the minds of the apostles and other teachers of the church.* Simon Magus, at a very early period, had endeavoured to convert the doctrines and the graces of the Gospel into a means of gain. Were nothing further recorded of him than what we find in sacred history, we should be disposed to regard him as little better than a vulgar impostor; but, according to very ancient tradition, he had studied at Alexandria, the principal seat of oriental philosophy, and had there become deeply versed in the occult sciences.† The belief in the power of magic was then very general, and Simon was only one of many who made it a source of profit. It is evident, from the answer he offered to the severe rebuke of St. Peter, — “Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of those things which you have spoken come upon me,” — that he was strongly impressed with a conviction of the divine authority of the apostles; but there is no foundation on which to rest the belief that he repented and became a real convert to the Christian faith. Tradition, on the contrary, says, that he subsequently exerted his magical arts with more assiduity than ever, and that he became a deep and inveterate enemy of the believers. There is every reason to suppose that this was the case; and if it were, it is not improbable but that he endeavoured to lessen the influence which the preaching and miracles of the Christian teachers might have among his countrymen, by endeavouring to explain them away on the principles of his own philosophy. It is said, that

* The number of heresies stated by ancient authors will surprise the reader: one names a hundred and fifty; another, eighty.

† Beausobre, *Hist. des Manich.*

among the chief tenets of this system was the doctrine that matter is eternal ; and that from its eternal and self-generated or necessary motion, spring that *evil principle*, with its various dependent agents, to the power of which it has been ever since subject. But this was the common source of other doctrines that led immediately to the most dangerous results ; and Simon's character and profession, it seems, induced him to carry the most noxious part of his system to the highest point of error and impiety. If the account given of his career be true, his opposition to the Christians was not confined to those of Judæa or Samaria, but displayed itself at Rome, where, it is reported, he exhibited his magical powers before the emperor Nero. Circumstances, however, of so fabulous a character are appended to the story of his life, that it would be next to impossible to decide how much of what is said respecting him deserves credit. It has been gravely asserted, that having undertaken to fly from a steep precipice, in order to amuse the emperor, he was, at the earnest prayer of the two apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul, dashed to pieces in the depth below. Of a similar description, almost, is the tradition that the Romans held him in such reverence that they raised a statue to his memory.* Jortin shrewdly observes on this subject, that it is hardly to be credited, that the proud Romans would have ever deified a Samaritan knave, and a strolling magician ; that it seems more probable that they would have sent him to the house of correction, or have bestowed transportation upon him, or a stone doublet, sooner than a statue.†

But the celebrity of Simon was surpassed by that of another impostor of the same class, Apollonius of Tyana. He was born in the town by the name of which he is distinguished, and enjoyed all the advantages which his descent from a noble and opulent family, and great natural talents, could bestow. His mind appears to have been bold, ardent, and inquisitive ; but sufficiently tinged with superstition to lead him from scepticism

* Eusebius, Eccles. Hist lib. ii. c. 13.

† Remarks on Eccles. Hist. vol. i. p. 337.

into the darkest and abstrusest paths of philosophy. After having gained considerable reputation for wisdom, he travelled into Persia and India, in which countries he conversed with the Brahmins and Magi on the mystic doctrines of their religions. In the various places which he visited in the course of his active life, the profoundest reverence was paid to his instructions; and he seems, in many instances, to have acted the part of a severe moral teacher, rather than that of a money-getting empiric. Thus, on observing the pride with which the people of Smyrna regarded their city, and with what pains they adorned it, he exhorted them to respect themselves rather than their town. At Athens he boldly reprov'd the effeminate and luxurious customs which prevailed there, and endeavoured to rouse the spirit of the people by reminding them of the deeds of their ancestors. He acted in a similar manner in other cities of Greece; after traversing which, he went to Rome. Such was the respect in which he was held, that in many places deputations waited on him from the inhabitants, requesting the aid of his wisdom; and even the mechanics would leave their occupations to listen to his addresses. It is not, however, to be supposed that this popularity was obtained by Apollonius through the simple exercise of his wisdom. He pretended to the power both of prophesying and curing diseases; and, even from the scanty notices which remain of his career, there is sufficient evidence to prove, that he was in these respects not less an impostor than Simon Magus.

The exertions of such men as these had, there is little doubt, their full influence on the popular mind; and, as they are said to have opposed the preachers of Christianity with all the power of their arts, it is not improbable, but that, in several instances, they increased the obstacles to conversion, or aided the return of the weak and ignorant to paganism. But it has been justly observed, that neither they nor Menander, who, like Simon Magus, was a native of Samaria, and prac-

tised similar arts, can be properly called heretics: it is extremely improbable that they ever made any approach to the real profession of Christianity; and it is certain that they were, in the sequel, among its bitterest enemies. Heresy, therefore, is to be ascribed to a different source; but it is sufficiently clear, from numerous passages in the New Testament, that it not only sprung up at a very early period, but produced, from its first appearance, many of the evils of which it was so fruitful a parent in later days. The disputes between those who desired to make Jews of the converts before they allowed them to become Christians, were the earliest that occurred; but they were quickly followed by those against which St. John is supposed to have written many passages in his Gospel, and which he again alludes to in the Apocalypse. The Nicolaitans were represented as deriving their tenets from the one common source which supplied the gnostics in general with their theology; but from the allusion made to them in the Revelations, we find that they were infested not merely with theoretical errors, but with the grossest licentiousness of manners.

The Ebionites, the Nazarenes *, and other sects, may be traced to a similar origin, but they did not appear in any formidably body till the second century.† Mention is also made of the heretic Cerinthus, in a manner which points him out as one of the most conspicuous actors among the schismatics of this early period; but, according to Tertullian, the chief heresies of the first century may be classed under the two heads of the Ebionites and the Docetæ.†

While schism, however, was thus beginning its work, the supreme head of the church was providing fit defenders of its doctrines, and such as should be esteemed worthy of succeeding his immediate followers in the labour of establishing his kingdom. The want of men to uphold the purity of the faith by their writings, was at first not great or general. To believe, to

* These heretics derived their chief errors from Jewish corruptions.

† De Præscript. Heretic. c. 33.

suffer, to love, not to write, it has been observed, “ was the primitive taste ;” and, accordingly, there are but a very few works, which can be properly regarded as the composition of Christians contemporary with the apostles. Of these, that known under the title of the *Pastor of Hermas* has been generally reputed the most ancient ; and the common opinion is, that its author was the *Hermas* mentioned by St. Paul in concluding his epistle to the Romans. These notions, however, of its antiquity, have not secured for it a continuance of the respect which it obtained in earlier eras of the faith. In some churches it was received as a portion of the canonical scriptures, and both *Irenæus* and *Origen* cite it under that character.* But this idea of its inspiration and divine authority appears to have given way to the cautious enquiries which were early instituted respecting the Sacred Canon ; and the rejection of such works, after they had been incautiously received by some as divine, affords a most valuable proof of the care with which the writings permanently acknowledged as Scripture, were admitted as a rule of faith.

The *Pastor of Hermas* is chiefly taken up with the relation of visions ; and is, therefore, too enigmatical to be generally useful. It thus yields the palm, in many respects, to a work of the same date, the *Epistle*, namely, universally attributed to *Clemens Romanus*, who is mentioned by St. Paul in the epistle to the *Philippians*, and was appointed to the bishopric of Rome in the year 93. The occasion of its being written is supposed to be described by *Irenæus*, when he says that, in the time of *Clement*, the church of Rome addressed a pathetic letter to the *Corinthians*, the object of which was to restore them to peace, by strengthening their faith, and recalling to their mind the traditions they had received from the apostles. In conformity with this account of the origin of the epistle, we find that it commences with an exhortation to the *Corinthians* to recollect the felicity they enjoyed before they were so

* Dupin, *Biblioth. Pat.* cent. i.

† *Ibid.* Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* lib. iii. c. 38.

divided among themselves by quarrels and dissensions; and to take warning, from the miseries which have ever attended such errors, to correct their conduct, and appease the anger of God by a speedy and sincere repentance. The most forcible language is employed to prove the guilt of those who ventured to oppose their pastors, chosen, as they had been, by the apostles, or by the faithful men who succeeded them; and the epistle concludes with an earnest entreaty, that the schism may be healed by a return, on the part of those who had thus grievously erred, to the general communion of the believers.

Many passages of this epistle are exceedingly eloquent, and exhibit the feelings of the writer as strongly moved by the most earnest desire of restoring union among his distracted brethren. "Once," says the venerable bishop, "ye all manifested a humble spirit, free from boasting and arrogance, and more willing to obey than command, and readier to give than to receive. Content with the divine allotments, and diligently attending to the word of Christ, ye were enlarged in your bowels of love, and had constantly before your eyes his sufferings on the cross. Hence a profound and happy peace possessed all your hearts; you were inspired with an unwearied desire of doing good, and enjoyed the plentiful effusion of the Holy Ghost. Full of counsel, and with all readiness of mind, and the godly assurance of faith, ye stretched forth your hands to the Lord Almighty, if in any matter ye had unwillingly offended him, and implored his mercy. Your care was, day and night, for all the brethren, that the number of his elect might be saved by grace and a good conscience. Sincere, and harmless, and forgiving one another, dissension and schism in the church would have seemed an abomination to you. Instead of allowing such evils to exist among you, ye mourned for the errors of your neighbours; ye sympathised with their infirmities as if they had been your own: ye were unwearied in holiness, and were ready to every good work; for adorned

with a venerable and upright conversation, and having the law of God deeply engraven on your hearts, ye performed all things in his fear ”

The epistle contains several allusions to points of apostolical doctrine, which serve considerably to increase its value ; and few readers will be inclined to dispute the opinions which the learned Dupin has expressed respecting it, when he says that, after the Holy Scriptures, it is one of the most valuable records of antiquity. This observation is borne out by the concurrent testimonies of the earliest writers of the church. Eusebius terms it a great and wonderful composition* ; and if we consider not only its intrinsic value, but its importance as one of the very earliest uninspired compositions we possess on the state of doctrine and discipline in the church, we shall not fail to perceive how much its value is increased to us by its antiquity.

Several other works have been attributed to the same author. Besides a second epistle, which goes under his name, but of which the authenticity is much doubted, he is said to have written an account of the disputes between St. Peter and Appian, of the occurrence of which, however, it is acknowledged, there is no mention in any very early author. The *Recognitiones Clementis* are equally unworthy of being ascribed to the wise and eloquent author of the epistle to the Corinthians ; and the celebrated Apostolical Constitutions, though of great antiquity, are shown, in the clearest manner, to have been falsely attributed to that writer.† The mistakes which have been made in ascribing these compositions to Clemens Romanus, have been committed in regard to other writers ; and there is, consequently, but little faith to be placed in the titles which ascribe several productions of the first three centuries to the companions of the apostles. In some instances, the errors thus committed are attributable to the names of the real authors having been the same as those of distinguished men in the church who lived before them. In others, they may

* Hist. Eccles. lib. iii. c. 16.

† Dupin. cent. i. Cave, Script. Eccles. Lit.

be accounted for, perhaps, by supposing that tradition having ascribed certain opinions, or actions, to the primitive fathers of the church, the works in which those opinions were expounded or insisted upon, or in which their rule of conduct was set forth, might perhaps be circulated under the authority of their names. In other instances, the errors of which we are speaking are evidently the result of the injudicious desire, of which many enquirers have been guilty, of discovering a name for every anonymous work, and of using every means in their power to fix that upon it to which their fancy has led them.

The Canons and Constitutions, said to have been the composition of the apostles themselves, may be mentioned in illustration of these remarks. According to the author of the work entitled Apostolical Constitutions, and which, as we have seen, was falsely ascribed to Clemens Romanus, not only these canons, but several other writings, were the production of the apostles. This assertion gained credit with some persons; but there is sufficient internal evidence to prove the falsity of the opinion thus advanced. The works which bear the name of Dionysius the Areopagite afford a similar illustration of the hasty or, in this instance, perhaps, fraudulent manner in which theological treatises were palmed upon men whose authority was likely to be of use in determining a particular question. Thus the works alluded to appear to have been never heard of till the Severians, in a sharp controversy with the Orthodox, brought them forward in defence of their opinions. They were then generally circulated as the production of the learned Athenian convert, and great numbers of persons gave a willing assent to the assertion of their authenticity. As soon, however, as they were examined by men properly qualified to detect their incongruities, it was discovered that they abounded in proofs of their, comparatively speaking, modern origin. Dupin * has given an excellent summary of the chief points in the argument; and it may not be uninterest-

* Biblioth. Pat. cent. i.

ing to the reader to see the mode in which controversies of this kind are conducted. In examining the work *De Divinis Hominibus*, it is proved to be not the production of Dionysius, from the following circumstances:— 1. It is dedicated to Timothy, but the author quotes from the epistle of Ignatius, who did not write till some time after the death of Timothy, whom he moreover terms his son, whereas Dionysius was certainly the younger. 2. He quotes and explains St. John's Gospel, and the Revelations, which were scarcely written while Dionysius was living; and yet, in this book, he calls himself a young man; and he also cites more than one portion of the Canon which, at that early period, was not admitted among the Scriptures already universally received. 3. He regrets the opinions of the Millenarians, who, it is well known, did not appear till long after the apostolic age; and extracts passages from the epistle which Ignatius addressed to the Romans a short time before his martyrdom, while Ignatius was not put to death till the reign of Trajan, and Dionysius suffered martyrdom in that of Domitian. The author also asserts that he was present at the death of the Virgin Mary; but Dionysius was not then converted, if the common account be received, that she died fifteen years after the crucifixion of our Saviour. But it is not only thus made evident that the work in question was not written at the early period claimed for its appearance, but that it was not composed till after the fourth century. For, in the first place, the Trinity and the Incarnation are spoken of in terms not used till after the fourth century. Secondly, Infant baptism is advocated on the foundation that there are ancient traditions in its favour: "We declare," remarks the author, "that which our bishops taught us, according to an ancient tradition;" an expression which, it is argued, could scarcely have been made use of by a person living at the period when Dionysius flourished. Thirdly, the administration of baptism is described as accompanied with those ceremonies which were not added to the simple rite till after the cessation of persecution. Fourthly,

Churches are spoken of, and their sanctuaries mentioned, and various regulations are alluded to, in a manner which could not have been done by any writer of the apostolic age. Fifthly, the author speaks of *Therapeutæ*, or monks, and distinguishes them according to their different orders; whereas it is well known that such classes of men did not exist till long after the time of Dionysius. And, lastly, he quotes Clemens Alexandrinus, who lived in the third, and alludes to subjects which were not the object of discussion before the fourth century.

The epistle of Barnabas rests its claim to authenticity on far better grounds than any other of the writings purporting to be of an antiquity as early as the apostolic age, with the exception, perhaps, of the Pastor of Hermas, and the epistle to the Corinthians by Clemens Romanus. The earliest ecclesiastical authors ascribe it to Barnabas, the companion of St. Paul; and it was by some persons regarded as of considerable authority. This opinion, however, was very properly rejected by the most learned of the fathers; and those who bear the plainest testimony to the propriety of its being attributed to Barnabas, explicitly deny its right to a place among the inspired writings. It has not been without controversy, indeed, that this epistle has come down to our times under the name which it bears; and though it is now generally allowed to exhibit all the proofs of authenticity that can be fairly demanded, it is unknown, owing to the want of the title, to whom it was addressed. From the contents, however, it appears to have been dedicated to certain Jewish converts, who, in conformity with the general prejudice of their brethren, placed an improper reliance on the efficacy of the law of Moses. Thus the former part of the address is occupied with observations intended to demonstrate the inadequacy of the old dispensation to save men from the effects of their sins, and the consequent necessity of the incarnation of Christ; and the second part consists of various useful instructions, and rules for the conduct of

life, both as to the practice of the chief virtues, and the avoiding of their corresponding vices.

The above-mentioned writings are the only productions of importance or deserved credit which have descended to us from the first century. There are some fragments remaining of Papias, who is said to have been the disciple of St. John, and who long enjoyed a certain species of celebrity from having originated the doctrine of Christ's temporal reign upon earth. According to the account given of his writings by Eusebius, he appears to have sought for information with great diligence among the companions of the apostles, and to have gathered from their lips the elements of that knowledge which he subsequently mixed up with the opinions to which he was led through a less certain track. Thus, in the quotations taken by the historian from the pre-mium of his writings, we find him saying, — " I have not, like many, followed those who abound in words, but those rather who teach the truth ; nor those who deliver strange and novel precepts, but those who published the commandments of the Lord delivered in parable, and proceeding from truth itself. Wherefore, if I met any one who had conversed with the elders, I cautiously enquired of him what had been the sayings of those elders? What Andrew, what Peter, what Philip, what Thomas, what James, what John, what Matthew, what the other disciples of the Lord, had been wont to say? What Aristion and John the Presbyter preached? For I did not think that any such profit could be derived from the reading of books as from the living voices of men yet on the earth." Many, however, of the traditions which he thus received are regarded as apocryphal; and Eusebius observes respecting his assertion, that there was an unrecorded prediction of Christ's which referred to his temporal reign, that he fell into this opinion from imperfectly understanding the apostolic narratives, and that his works afford proofs of his being deficient in strength of mind.*

* Hist. Eccles. lib. iii. c. 9.

The fathers who lived in the latter portion of this century were destined, both by their actions and writings, to take a far more conspicuous part in the affairs of the church than any of the above : but it was not till the succeeding age that their virtues or their talents were put to the severe trial which awaited them ; and, therefore, though they are ranked among the fathers of the first century, both by Dupin and others, it is not till we come to describe the events in which they were so deeply concerned, that we shall allude to their writings. Before, however, passing from this part of the subject, a class of works is to be named, which, though worse than valueless in themselves, are yet of some use, as affording indications of the danger to which the church in its infancy was exposed, not merely from open enemies, but from the weak, superstitious, and fraudulently disposed persons who entered its communion, without having any idea of the sublime and unsullied truth which should form the basis of Christian morals. Allusion has already been made to the apostolic Canons ; but this was only one of a large series of similar productions, all of which claimed the most sacred origin. Thus, there is a letter said to have been written by Christ himself to Agbarus king of Edessa, who, in his epistle to our Lord, which called forth the reply in question, declared, that having heard of his miracles, he was persuaded that he was God, or the Son of God. In answer to which, Christ is reported to have said,—“ Thou art happy, Agbarus, for having believed in me, without seeing me ; for it is written of me, that they that see me shall not believe in me ; to the end that they that believe in me without seeing me may receive eternal life.” A narrative accompanies the letter, which adds considerably to the evident grossness of the forgery ; but, notwithstanding the plainest proofs of its fictitious character, it has not been without believers in its authenticity. As the sacred name of the Saviour was thus employed, the reader will not be surprised to hear that there are some letters of which the Virgin Mary is the reputed author ; and

still less that there is a series of counterfeit Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelations. Among the most celebrated of these apocryphal books, are the Gospel according to the Egyptians, and the Gospel according to the Hebrews. Both appear to have obtained credit with some persons in the church; and the former is said to have been generally quoted by the Sabellians, as proving the truth of their doctrines: Jerome regarded the latter so highly, that he translated it from Syriac into Greek and Latin; and has left it on record, that an opinion was entertained by some that it was the original of St. Matthew's Gospel, which, it has been so frequently conjectured, was written originally in Hebrew. This idea, however, is unsupported by any valid argument; and the spuriousness of the work was, at a very early period, acknowledged by the church at large.

But besides these Gospels, which, by the general nature of their contents, were less offensive to the common sense and knowledge of the faithful than such forgeries usually are, there were several others, in favour of the authenticity of which there was not even the shadow of an argument. Such were the books which pretended to give an account of the infancy of our Lord; the Gospels of Philip, of Thaddeus, Barnabas, and Andrew; and, yet more marvellous, the one attributed to the traitor Judas himself. Nothing can exceed in absurdity many of the stories recounted in these supposititious scriptures. The most extravagant imaginations, and the weakest intellects, seem to have been employed in their fabrication; and every portion of their narratives affords the most striking illustration of the important distinction which exists between that which is above, and that which is contrary to, reason. Thus, in the relation of Christ's appearance before Pilate, in the Gospel of Nicodemus, it is said that the ensigns or banners bowed themselves twice before him when the soldiers came to apprehend him; and wherever any comparison can be instituted between the facts recorded in the real word of Scripture, and the inventions which fill up the

pages of these false Gospels, it is impossible for the mind not to be impressed in the liveliest manner with the simple sublimity, the pure and luminous truth, of the sacred history, rendered so much more obvious and calculated to inspire admiration, when thus placed in opposition to its counterfeit.

Nor did the apostles confine themselves to the composition of narratives or epistles, if any credit could be given to some early authors and their followers. According to them, the primitive age of the church was not only fruitful in histories of every kind, but liturgies were composed by the apostles with as much care and particularity as if the church had been furnished, in their time, with all the various external rites and ceremonies, and with the same means of performing them, which it acquired in the times of its advancing prosperity. St. Peter, St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. James, are all of them said to have composed liturgies; but, unfortunately for the credit of those who ventured to adopt so absurd a supposition, the forms of prayer, the subjects, and the expressions, are of such a nature as to preclude the possibility of their having been set forth at the period alleged. Thus, in the liturgy to which the name of St. Matthew is affixed, there are prayers, not only for kings, in conformity with the apostolic maxim, but for archbishops, patriarchs, and popes. The same circumstance occurs in the compilations ascribed to St. Mark and St. James; evidently showing that there was not even the pretence of any very remote antiquity to favour the supposition of their sacred origin.

There is one production, however, purporting to be the joint work of the apostles, of a very different character to any of those above mentioned. The origin of the Apostles' Creed has been a subject of long and difficult controversy; but the strictly scriptural nature of its several articles leaves no doubt that it was compiled by persons deeply interested in establishing the simple truths of the Gospel. Those, therefore, who

are least inclined to allow its direct origin from the apostles, admit that its conformity with their doctrines, and the usefulness of such a compendium, justify its being denominated their Creed. But many writers of eminence have contended for the truth of the tradition which affirms, that it was the actual production of the inspired teachers of the Gospel, and that they each of them contributed to its composition: some even have gone so far as to suppose the particular way in which it was put together; one party contending that each of the apostles pronounced an article, others that all the disciples took part in its construction, and another party that it was compiled by the apostles after a solemn conference held for the purpose of determining the rule of faith.

The arguments by which these opinions respecting the immediate apostolic origin of the creed in question have been rebutted, are clear and convincing. It is very properly observed, that there is no mention made in the Acts of the Apostles, of their having met in conference for the purpose alluded to; that the fathers of the first three centuries, in their various disputes with heretics, though they frequently observe that the doctrines of the Apostles' Creed are the same as those delivered by the apostles, do not assert that it was actually composed by those holy men; and lastly, that if they had indeed prepared such a profession of faith, it would have been universally received, and would have existed in precisely the same form in all churches; the contrary of which is the case. From these considerations, the most learned theologians have embraced the opinion, that the apostles did certainly never compile any form of profession; but that having, with great zeal and labour, diffused the knowledge of the doctrines contained in the creed which goes by their name, some of their early followers disposed the truths they had received from their lips into the sentences which form the admirable summary of Christian belief on which we are speaking.

From what has been now related, it will appear that a very high idea was formed, in the age which immediately succeeded the primitive and apostolic era, of the activity, the power, and learning, which characterised the teachers of that period. It need scarcely be said, that such a notion must lead to very false views of the character of the infant church; and that it has arisen from an injudicious desire of ascribing to it honours of a kind which it did not require, or of making use of its authority to support opinions or practices which had not their origin till a later age. The establishment of the Gospel was to be manifestly the work of the Spirit and the power of God; human agency was, therefore, to be kept, in the strongest sense of the term, subordinate to the divine interference; and not only by the positive employment of miracles, but by the general operation of the Spirit, converting or influencing every species of agent, whether near or remote, the foundations of the church were laid without any human help that could make the men of that generation suppose, for an instant, that it was not altogether the work of God.

The establishment of showy ceremonies, or the introduction of those exterior ornaments of worship which were, some time after, employed on the specious but weak plea of interesting the vulgar, was as unnecessary at this period as it would have been mischievous: it would have spoken of the wisdom and ingenuity of men; and to this was opposed the whole ceremony of the divine procedure. The same may be remarked respecting the support of the Gospel by the arguments or writings of uninspired authors. The only men employed to defend its truth, or propagate its doctrines, at its first publication, were specially chosen to the office, and then endowed with a power which they could not but acknowledge to be divine. And not only were they thus chosen, but they had also particular appointments; their lines did not interfere with each other, nor did they extend indefinitely over the whole space to be cultivated by their labours: even St. Paul, extensive as was the

course marked out for him, only wrote, except in one instance, for single congregations. This is sufficient to indicate that the circumstances of the Christian community were not as yet such as to call for written defences of the Gospel; that the time was not come for its being advocated by human eloquence or ingenuity; and that, therefore, it would be absurd to suppose that general constitutions and canons, professions of catholic faith, and histories and epistles, were multiplied according to the rate in which they are reported to have been, in the apostolic age.

In concluding these remarks, it may be briefly said, that the history of the first century of the Christian church, while it offers few of those positive statements which may be found in the records of later ages, is yet sufficiently distinct, as to all the most important characteristics of history, to satisfy the fair and honest enquirer. It plainly exemplifies the ruling spirit of the period, and the motives by which the chief actors in the events which occurred were influenced; it sets forth a sufficient number of circumstances to account for the results to which it leads us in the sequel; and it all along shows, in the most distinct manner, the conflict which was going on between the two great powers then contending for mastery—between the upper and the nether currents, the virtues and vices of our nature.

CHAP. III.

STATE OF THE CHRISTIANS DURING THE REIGN OF TRAJAN.

— MARTYRDOM OF IGNATIUS. — REIGN OF ADRIAN. — HIS CONDUCT TOWARDS THE CHRISTIANS. — INSURRECTION OF BARCOCHEBAS. — ANTONINUS PIUS. — REFLECTIONS ON HIS CHARACTER. — MARCUS AURELIUS. — PERSECUTION. — JUSTIN MARTYR. — POLYCARP. — THE GALLIC PERSECUTION. — CHANGE IN THE EMPEROR'S DISPOSITION. — COMMODUS. — INTERNAL STATE OF THE CHURCH. — HERESIES.

THE calm in which the preceding century closed was of short duration. At the death of Nerva, the Chris-

tians saw a monarch ascend the throne, from whose general character they might cherish the expectation that justice would be administered with an impartial hand, but whose education as a soldier and a politician had badly prepared him for investigating with fairness the nature of their doctrines, or the views by which they were directed. The tranquillity of the late reign had contributed greatly to the increase of their numbers; and the church, both at Rome, and in other parts of the empire, continued to present every day a more formidable appearance to its suspicious enemies. This was probably the main reason of the hostility with which Trajan, from the very commencement of his reign, regarded the Christians; but he was a stern lover of discipline, and the state of the empire taught him to look with severity on any violation of established order. It has been asserted by writers of eminence, that there were no laws in force against the Christians at this time*; but expressions have been pointed out in the works of Tertullian, which render this opinion exceedingly doubtful†; and even supposing there were no particular edicts then in force against the church, this would scarcely serve to support the notion that its members were not still exposed to the danger of persecution. The tolerance of the Roman government could never be trusted while those general laws against new religions were unrepealed, which might so easily be applied to the punishment of Christians. It has been observed by the historian of the Decline and Fall, that “the policy of the emperors and the senate, as far as it concerned religion, was happily seconded by the reflections of the enlightened, and by the habits of the superstitious part of their subjects; that the various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosopher as equally false, and by the magistrate as equally useful;” and that “this toleration produced not

* Mosheim, cent. ii. part i. c. 2.

† Bishop Kaye's Hist. illust. from Tertullian, c. ii. p. 114.

only mutual indulgence, but even religious concord." * But in making these observations, the author would have better enabled the reader to form a correct view of the subject, had he modified his eulogy of Roman tolerance, by giving the actual opinion of both a well-known philosopher and magistrate on the subject. The sentiments attributed to Mæcenas in Dio Cassius are, " that the gods should by all means be honoured according to the customs of the country; and that those who did not, should be forced so to honour them, and that such persons as were for ever introducing something novel in religion should be hated and punished, not only because of the gods, but because they who introduce new divinities mislead others into receiving foreign laws, the fruitful source of conspiracies and secret meetings, which are dangerous above all things to the monarchy." Cicero, moreover, says, " that no man should have separate gods for himself, nor worship by himself new or foreign gods, unless they had been publicly recognised by the laws†;" and still further, it is distinctly stated by another distinguished civilian, Julius Paulus, that those who introduced new religions, or the tendency and nature of which were unknown, should, if of the other classes, be degraded, and if of the lower, be punished with death." ‡

While such were the opinions of the most enlightened men of the nation, it is not difficult to conjecture what must have been the dispositions of that large class of persons who, possessing far less philosophy or intelligence, enjoyed situations of considerable power as priests or magistrates. Without those motives to tolerance which learning and reflection supply, and urged to favour persecution by their own private interest, the provincial governors and their subordinate officers would, with few exceptions, not fail to uphold the ancient precepts of the law against innovations. The

* Decline and Fall, ch. xvi. Dr. Neander has some useful observations on this subject, and concludes against Musheim. See his Hist. of Three First Cent. by Rose.

† De Leg. ii. 8.

‡ Neander, i. 81.

mildness of Nerva had protected the Christians, as far as a benevolent system of policy, founded on the temper of the chief magistrate, not on the laws, can effect such an object ; but Christianity still came under the class of religions not recognised by the state, “ *non publicè adscitos.*” Those, therefore, who professed it, necessarily stood exposed to oppressions against which they could offer no resistance ; and for which they could find no relief in the laws. It accordingly appears, that Nerva was no sooner dead, than the persecutions of the former reign were recommenced, before any thing, as it seems, could have occurred to injure the Christian character. The measures, moreover, which Trajan undertook, were evidently pursued by his ministers, and by the populace in general, with a ready violence, which exceeded the wishes of the monarch. Of this fact, and of the inoffensive conduct of the believers, we have a striking proof in the well known letter of Pliny the younger, then proconsul of Pontus and Bithynia, who, unwilling to indulge the populace in their passion for persecution, and yet feeling obliged to punish, found a species of responsibility imposed upon him, from which he would willingly have escaped.

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104.

“ I have never personally assisted,” says the proconsul, in the above mentioned letter to the emperor, “ in any trial of the Christians, and therefore cannot tell on what the information against them rests, nor to what degree they merit punishment. I am much influenced by difference of age ; and the following is the method I have pursued with regard to such as have been brought before me as Christians. I have asked them whether they were really Christians. On their confessing that they were, I have questioned them a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment ; and on their persevering in the confession, I have commanded them to be led forth, not doubting but that inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished. Nothing can compel those to adore thy image with incense, or to call on the gods, or to curse Christ, who are really Christians. This is the sum of their error. They are

accustomed to assemble on a stated day before light; to sing a hymn to Christ among themselves by turns; and to bind themselves by an oath, to commit no wickedness,—neither fraud, nor robbery, nor adultery,—and never to violate faith. These things having been done, it is their custom to depart, and assemble again to take meat, but promiscuously and without offence. Many persons, of all ages, of all orders, and of either sex even, are placed in peril; for the contagion of this superstition has invaded not only the towns, but even the villages and fields. It is sufficiently evident, indeed, that our temples are almost deserted, that our sacred rites have been for a long time intermitted, and that there is rarely to be found a purchaser of the victims.” *

The answer of Trajan exhibits that mixture of clemency and injustice, of tolerance and tyranny, which can only be accounted for on the supposition that he had no clear or fixed notions of justice, and that he was willing to remain wholly ignorant of the real nature of Christianity.—“ You have done perfectly right, my dear Pliny,” he says, “ in your proceedings against the Christians who have been brought before you; it being impossible to establish any regular or general form in affairs of this kind. No search should be made after them; but if they are accused and convicted, they must be punished. Should the accused, however, deny that he is a Christian, and prove that he is not by invoking the gods, then let him be pardoned, whatever may have been his former profession. But in regard to no crimes, ought accusations to be received which are not signed by some person, for the contrary would be a very dangerous course, and would little become our reign.”

The consequence of the emperor’s entertaining these ideas on the subject, was a temporary pause in the proceedings of the persecutors. His directions to Pliny

* Plin. lib. x. ep. 103. Lardner argues, from the former part of the letter, against the existence of edicts against the Christians; supposing, he adds, that the edicts of Nero and Domitian had been abrogated.—*Testimonies of Ancient Heathens*, c. ix.

passed into a decree, and the odious system of anonymous accusation was suppressed. But it is easy to perceive that this could not long protect the Christians. They could not conceal their conversion without much difficulty, nor at all times without endangering their honesty. The hatred with which they were regarded was seldom so lukewarm that open accusers were wanting to satisfy the conditions of the law; and thus the apparent clemency, and, so far as it went, praiseworthy caution, of the emperor, would merely have the effect of driving their merciless enemies to throw off the little shame which had made them prefer ruining their victims in secret, to meeting them face to face at the tribunals.

That this was really the case, appears from the accounts we possess of what occurred in the provinces soon after Trajan's opinion became known. In Palestine, for example, the Jews came forward with the utmost readiness to prefer accusations against the Christians; and so far was the governor from rejecting their suspicious evidence, that Simeon, the second bishop of Jerusalem, was condemned to death on their testimony. This venerable man was 120 years old when he was thus called to martyrdom; but his age afforded him no protection, and he was for several days subjected to the most cruel tortures, before he was led forth, like his Lord, to crucifixion.*

But the punishments of the Christians did not always depend on vulgar accusations, or on the judgments of magistrates who might be supposed to have acted without attention to the spirit of the emperor's decree. In the year 106, Trajan passed through Antioch, on his way to the seat of the Parthian war; and during his stay in that city, one of the most revered and enlightened men that the church possessed became the object of his bitter and unrelenting persecution. This was the pious and eloquent Ignatius, surnamed Theophorus, who had been appointed to the bishopric of Antioch,

* Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* lib. iii. c. 32. Fleury, *Histoire Ecc.* l. iii. n. 1.

as early as the year 70.* On the first intelligence of the emperor's arrival, he had trembled with the anxiety of a parent for the safety of his people ; and hoping that by coming forward himself he might avert the threatened danger, he sought the monarch, openly confessed his faith, and denounced the gods to whom the world so blindly paid homage. According to the account given of this interview in the ancient treatise entitled "The Acts of his Martyrdom†," Trajan said to him, as he approached the tribunal, "Art thou he who, like a bad demon, goest about violating my commands, and leading men to perdition?"—"Let no one," he replied, "call Theophorus a bad demon, forasmuch as all wicked spirits are departed far from the servants of God ; but if you call me impious because I am hostile to evil demons, I am content with the name, for I dissolve all their snares through the inward support of Christ, the heavenly king."—"And pray who is Theophorus?" said Trajan. "He who has Christ in his breast," rejoined the bishop. "And thinkest thou not," continued the emperor, "that the gods, who fight for us against our enemies, reside in us?"—"You err," answered Ignatius, boldly, "in calling the demons of the nations gods: for there is only one God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is ; and one Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, whose kingdom be my portion!"—"His kingdom, do you mean?" said the emperor, "who was crucified under Pilate,"—"His," was the reply, "who crucified my sins with its author, and has put all the sin and malice of Satan under the feet of those who carry him in their hearts."—"Dost thou, then," pursued Trajan, "carry him who was crucified within thee?"—"I do," said Ignatius; "for it is written, 'I dwell in them, and walk

* Eusebius, lib. iii. c. 22. According to this author (c. 36.) he succeeded St. Peter: others dispute this point; but allow that he was acquainted with several of the apostles.

† This document is quoted by Fleury and others ; but its authenticity is much doubted. Jortin, "Remarks on Eccles. Hist." says it has the appearance of being genuine, except the last section. Lardner is of a contrary opinion.

in them :'' on hearing which, the emperor exclaimed, "Since Ignatius confesses that he carries within himself him that was crucified, we command that he be carried, bound by soldiers, to great Rome, there to be thrown to wild beasts, for the entertainment of the people." The orders of the emperor were immediately put in execution. The aged bishop was seized and carried to Smyrna ; during his short stay in which city he held many discourses with Polycarp, the bishop there, and who had been the disciple of St. John. The conversation of these venerable men contributed to their mutual support and comfort ; and Ignatius, anxious to avail himself of the little time which remained to him, had interviews with the deputies of various churches, to whom he communicated consolation and instruction ; and before his departure wrote letters to the Christians of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, and Rome. These epistles, with the others subsequently written, are highly valued for the pure and earnest devotion which they throughout exhibit, and are considered as one of the most precious relics of antiquity.* They abound in passages which show with what resignation, and even desire, Ignatius awaited the time for demonstrating his faith in the doctrines he preached. That to the Romans is a continued appeal against the tenderness of those who would have used their efforts to save him, and has rarely been equalled in sentiment by any thing proceeding from the mouth of man. "I dread," says he, "your charity, and fear that you have too much compassion for me. It would be easy for you, perhaps, to save me from dying, but in opposing my death you oppose my happiness. If you have a true love for me, you will suffer me to depart to the enjoyment of my God. I can never have a better occasion for returning to him than the present ; and you may perform a good work by leaving me in the

* The shorter epistles of this father are generally allowed to be genuine : those which he wrote to the churches above-named are mentioned by Eusebius and Jerome. See Du Pin, *Bibliotheca Patrum*, cent. ii. And Cave, *Hist. Lit.*

hands of my enemies, and suffering me without interruption to rejoin the Lord. But if you permit yourselves to be touched by a false compassion for this miserable body, you will be sending me back to labour, and forcing me to begin my course afresh. Suffer me, then, to be sacrificed now that the altar is prepared ; interfere not with the sacrifice, but in singing hymns of thanksgiving to the Father and the Son while I am offered up. You have never been guilty of envy towards others ; why should you be envious of my felicity ? Seek rather to obtain for me, by your prayers, strength to resist and repel whatever attacks I may suffer, whether from within or without. It is of little use to seem Christians, if we be not so in reality ; and that which makes a man a Christian is not a fair appearance and fine words, but grandeur of soul and established virtue. Write to the churches, informing them that I go joyfully to die, if you do not oppose yourselves. I beseech you then, yet again, not to nourish a tenderness which would injure me. Suffer me to become the food of bears and lions ; it will afford a very short passage to heaven : I am God's wheat ; it is necessary that I should be ground, that I may be made bread fit to be offered to Jesus Christ. Excite, rather, the beasts which are to be set against me, that they may wholly devour me, and that nothing may remain of my body to be chargeable to any one. When the world shall see no part of my frame remaining, it will then be known that I am a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Pray to the Lord that I may be to him an acceptable sacrifice."

Thus far the sentiments of Ignatius are not more ardent than we might expect to find them, proceeding as they did from the mouth of a man animated with the most anxious desire to confirm the professors of Christianity in zeal and resolution, and supported by a faith which glowed with sufficient intenseness to throw every object but the hope of heaven and eternity into shade. There are some parts, however, of the letter, which have

been read with regret by persons, of the warmth of whose devotion there can be no doubt, but who have questioned the propriety of such language as that employed by Ignatius, when he expresses an unwillingness to be spared, and great anxiety to find every thing at Rome prepared for his martyrdom.* But much of the seeming extravagance may be explained away, when it is remembered, that the aged bishop was writing to a people in whom there was probably little appearance of that zeal and self-devotion so necessary to a church placed in the midst of enemies, and, humanly speaking, solely dependent for support on the readiness of its members to defend their principles at the expense of personal suffering. The conclusion of the epistle, also, is in a style of such deep humility, that it is possible Ignatius, while urging the Romans not to interfere for his sake, might be trembling lest his own resolution should fail, and thus think it necessary to employ the most powerful language to put a stop to communications which tended to make him hesitate in his course. "The flame which animates and impels me forward," he says, "cannot suffer any alloy, any mixture which might enfeeble it. He who lives and speaks in me, whispers continually in the recesses of my heart, 'Hasten to come to my Father.' If, therefore, when I arrive among you, I be found to express other sentiments, attend not to them, but to those only which you now see me write. I do it with a mind entirely free, and I employ these last moments of my life to let you know, that I desire nothing so much as its speedy termination. I have no longer any relish for what men usually seek; the bread which I desire is the adorable flesh of Jesus Christ, and the wine which I demand is his precious blood,—that celestial wine which lights in the soul the living and immortal fire of an incorruptible charity. I belong no longer to the world. I no longer regard myself as living among men. Remember, in

* Milner, Hist. of Church of Christ, i. 166.

your prayers, the church of Syria, which, deprived of its pastor, rests all its hopes on Him who is the sovereign Pastor of all the churches."

On the arrival of Ignatius in the neighbourhood of Rome, the Christians went out in a body to meet him ; and many, notwithstanding the sentiments expressed in his letter, continued to entreat him that he would not prohibit their employing whatever interest they possessed to save his valuable life. But he persisted in his resolution not to suffer any compromise whatever to take place on his account ; and, after a short interval had been allowed him for praying with and addressing the people, he was conducted to the amphitheatre, and being placed in the arena, was speedily devoured by the wild animals let loose upon him, — a fragment or two of his bones being all that was left for his friends to collect and convey to Antioch.

The feelings of the Christians were strongly excited by the devotion which Ignatius had manifested in all his conduct, and by the almost supernatural fortitude with which he met his death. At the conclusion of the awful spectacle, those who had attended him on his journey retired to the house in which they lodged, and prostrating themselves before God, passed the night in prayer and watching. But some among them, it is said, overpowered by the violent emotions they had experienced, sunk at intervals into slumber, and imagined, while in that state, that Ignatius appeared to them, entering the room as it were in haste, and tenderly embracing them. Others dreamt that they heard him praying, and giving his benediction ; while some believed that he appeared to them as a person just escaped from a long and violent struggle, and standing in the presence of God, crowned with glory. It was felt by the trembling Christians, that these were but imaginations, and that they might be ascribed to the scenes of the past day ; but they allowed themselves to draw consolation from their dreams, the strongest faith being as willing as sus-

picion to receive confirmation from any circumstance whatever which harmonises with its own suggestions.*

A.D. 117. The martyrdom of Ignatius took place on the 20th of December, 107 †, and it was followed by numerous others, so little did the justice or clemency of Trajan serve to protect the Christians. He was succeeded by Adrian, during the first six years of whose reign they suffered severely from the continued operation of his predecessor's edict. But towards the end of that period, the emperor visited Athens; and, though chiefly occupied while there with his initiation into the mysteries of Eleusis, he admitted an apology to be presented to him for the Christians by the learned Quadratus, a pious and eloquent man, who is said to have been a disciple of the apostles, and to have possessed the gift of prophecy. The apology of Quadratus was followed or accompanied by another from Aristides, an Athenian philosopher, who still retained the garb of his early profession. Happily for the church, the arguments of these two enlightened champions, combined with Adrian's personal aversion to violence, produced a change in his mind greatly to their advantage.‡ This was farther promoted by a letter from the proconsul of Asia, Serenius Granianus, who reasoned with him in the strongest manner on the injustice of allowing the Christians to perish as they did, — mere victims of popular hate and violence. An order was, therefore, issued, prohibiting their further punishment, unless regularly convicted before the proper judges of breaking the laws. Tranquillity was thus restored to the church at large; but in Judea it was broken by the frantic proceedings of the impostor Barchochebas, who pretended to be the mighty deliverer whom Balaam had described under the figure

* Many circumstances recorded in the ancient documents of ecclesiastical history may be explained on this principle; and the apparent marvellousness of a narrative be rendered thereby less objectionable in the eyes of critics.

† Ten years later is the date assigned by Le Clerc, &c.

‡ Quadratus was most probably the first of the Christian apologists. Eusebius speaks of his work with great praise, *Eccles. Hist. lib. iii. c. 37*. He also bears testimony to the worth of Aristides, *Id. lib. iv. c. 3*.

of a star. Having succeeded in gathering together a large body of his deluded countrymen, he laid the country waste with havoc and confusion. The Christians were the especial objects of his fury, and many perished at the hands of his sanguinary followers. The attention, however, of Adrian was at length drawn to the distracted province; and, after a short conflict, the rebels were defeated. What few relics of Jerusalem still existed were destroyed, and the ploughshare was drawn over the soil on which the holy city had once stood, that not an object of the minutest kind might remain to awaken any dangerous recollection in the minds of the fierce but unfortunate Jews. A new town, under the name of *Elia Capitolina*, soon arose on the spot. The Christians were allowed to remain there uninterrupted, and seem to have enjoyed not only security, but prosperity; the emperor's relation, *Aquila*, who had been appointed governor of the new city, becoming himself a faithful member and supporter of the church.*

No other event of importance appears to have occurred in the reign of Adrian, which lasted above twenty years; during the last fourteen of which he was, to a certain degree, the protector rather than persecutor of the Christians. His directions, however, it has been justly observed †, were not sufficiently definite to form a solid barrier for them against their enemies; and had not his successor, *Antoninus Pius*, been a man of enlightened mind and amiable disposition, they would have been of little more use than the orders of *Trajan*. It is apparent, from the letters which he sent to the magistrates of several provinces on the subject, that it required all his clemency and authority to suppress the persecuting propensities which infected the minds of his pagan subjects. "I am convinced," says he, in addressing the magistracy of *Asia*, "that it is for the gods themselves to take care that men of this kind should not escape; for

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* Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* lib. iv. c. 6.

† Neander. Like the edict of *Trajan*, the rescript of this emperor must have had a very different interpretation, according to the mildness or severity of the magistrates.

it is much more fitting that they should punish those who refuse to worship them, than that you should. But while you accuse them as impious, you in many instances confirm the opinions and sentiments of those against whom you rise so tumultuously. It is, in fact, much more desirable for them to be condemned, and to seem to suffer death for their God, than to remain safe ; for thus they become victors, proving that they prefer sacrificing their lives to doing those things which you command. Concerning the earthquakes which have occurred, or are even now taking place, it is not improper to admonish you, who lose your fortitude when such things occur, and yet compare your principles with theirs. They, in such circumstances, place a greater confidence in God, while you, failing through want of knowledge, as it seems to me, neglect the gods and your other duties, and the service of the immortals. But the Christians, who worship Him, you expel and persecute unto death. Many of the governors of provinces formerly addressed our most sacred father concerning them ; and he wrote in reply, that they were not to exercise force against them, unless they appeared to be undertaking any thing against the Roman government. And many persons have also brought information to me respecting them, and the informants I have answered according to the decision of my father ; but if any one should still be determined on troubling these persons on account of their profession, let the accused be set free, although he should be proved a Christian, and the accuser punished.”*

There is an earnestness in the spirit of this epistle which does honour to the writer, and carries conviction to the mind of the reader, that it was dictated from the most enlightened view of religious liberty that men were capable of taking in the age when it was produced. How is it, we feel prompted to ask ; that one who both felt and reasoned so rightly did not himself become a Christian ? A very simple answer will suffice. There

* Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* lib. iv. c. 13.

were but two ways by which conversion could be brought about ; that is, by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or by such a fair and reasonable study of the evidences as would, by the ordinary processes of argumentation, produce a conviction of the truth. The almighty Head of the church did not see fit to make the rulers of the world, at this early period, the fosterers of his people ; and Antoninus was therefore left, like the rest of men, to employ or neglect the means he possessed for acquiring a knowledge of the new religion, and of the proofs on which its divine origin was established. But the elevated situation of Antoninus, by placing the cares of government above every other consideration, would, in the first instance, indispose him to separate the idea of religion from the political influence which that of his country had long exercised on the state. There was thus an obstacle to his conversion by the ordinary means of conviction, greater than those which opposed the conversion of most other men. His fine moral principles, the excellency of his character, and the elevation of his mind, may be supposed, it is true, to have more than counterbalanced both this and every other adverse circumstance ; but it is to be recollected, that the purest moral feeling, unless accompanied with a considerable portion of intellectual activity and inquisitiveness, will not always dispose its possessor to undertake the investigation of truth, however it may fit him to enjoy it when he sees it in its full and unclouded light. There is a certain species of self-satisfaction in the profession of particular sentiments, which lulls the mind into tranquillity ; and, while it renders the heart and the tongue eloquent, satisfies the reason without calling it into exercise, and thereby greatly contributes to incapacitate as well as indispose it for the vigorous exercise of enquiry. A man, whose mental constitution is thus characterised, is usually highly deserving of respect and veneration as an example in the conduct of life, but is seldom conspicuous as a logician, or as one who may be safely followed as a guide in the adop-

tion of unexamined opinions. Neither his rejection, therefore, nor his belief of a particular system, ought to be considered as of importance in our estimation of the evidences by which others adopted or rejected it ; and the conduct of Antoninus Pius affords only one, among numberless instances, in which men of the most admirable moral characters have proved but indifferent enquirers after truth.

The benevolence, however, and love of justice, which formed so conspicuous a part of this monarch's character, proved, for above twenty years, a safeguard to his Christian subjects. His successor, Marcus, was theoretically, and in the general conduct of public affairs, equally a lover of justice ; but his mind was in other respects differently constituted. He possessed a disposition for enquiry ; and there is reason to believe that he valued intellectual endowments sufficiently to make him regard truth as the great object after which he should strive ; but his pride was equal to his acuteness, and his love of the system he professed was at least equal to his love of truth. Christianity, rising as it appeared to do from among the multitude, would have all the prejudices of such a man against it. The time was not yet come, when either physical or moral philosophy could discover that its noblest triumphs were to be effected by the simple investigation of facts ; and Marcus Aurelius, and many other men of the same character, satisfied with the moral theory they had wrought out for themselves, believed, as we are told the astronomers did with their circles and circular motions, that it included the idea of perfection, and that whatever did not tally with it must of necessity be wrong. Thus prepared for viewing the Christians with contempt, the good reported of them would go but a short way towards persuading him that their system was true ; and so long as he believed it false, and was continually receiving prejudiced accounts of its effects from bigoted philosophers and popular magistrates, he would have two of the strongest motives to punish its professors that

could meet in the same mind. As an emperor, he would feel it to be a matter of policy to repress such a sect; as a philosopher, proud to exercise his power for his theory against all hostile systems, he would persecute from the impulse of a blinded conscience.

The church by this time numbered among its members several men of great learning, and the custom was becoming pretty general of defending the truth of the Gospel by written apologies. From one of these* we learn, that so entirely had Antoninus withdrawn the protection of the laws from the Christians, that their enemies, taking advantage of his decrees, attacked them both by day and night, and robbed and otherwise injured the most inoffensive persons. "If we are thus treated," says the apologist, "by your command, let these things be done rightly; for a just monarch should counsel nothing unjustly; and we willingly bear the gift of such a death. This only we beg of thee, that you would yourself first examine the men who appear endowed with such a love of strife, and that you would justly determine whether they are worthy of death and persecution, or of safety and tranquillity. But if this counsel and new decree, which ought not to have been issued even against hostile barbarians, be not yours, much more do we beseech you not to suffer us to be exposed any longer to daily violence."

Neither this, however, nor any of the other addresses which were sent to the emperor, had the effect of inducing him to suppress the sanguinary proceedings of which the Christians complained. The scenes which had disgraced the reign of Nero were again acted in that of the philosopher Antoninus.† The common laws of justice and humanity were equally despised; virtue and learning, if combined with the name of Christian, were treated with the same contempt; and the pride of the reasoning Stoic was every where seen developing itself in the same effects as the flagitious hate of the abandoned sensualist.

* That of Melito, bishop of Sardis, quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* lib. iv. c. 26.

† Fleury, *Histoire Ecclés.* lib. iii. n. 45.

Among those who suffered in this persecution were two of the most distinguished ornaments of the church, — the erudite Justin Martyr, and the venerable Polycarp. The former of these celebrated men was a native of Neapolis, or Sichem, in Samaria. His father, whose name was Priscus, was a Gentile, and seems to have been a person of some consequence, his property enabling him to bestow on his son a learned education.* The mind of Justin was early imbued with the love of philosophy; and, while still a youth, he proceeded to Alexandria, where he became acquainted with all the principal systems which then occupied the attention of scholars and theologians. His fondness for study, however, was accompanied with an anxiety to satisfy the craving of his mind after some positive knowledge of the Deity, which speedily rendered him dissatisfied with the instructions he received from the Stoic under whom he had placed himself. It was not necessary, his tutor informed him, to labour for knowledge of this kind; and Justin sought out a Peripatetic from whom he hoped to derive more satisfaction on the great subject which so deeply interested his heart. But, to the disappointment of this ardent and devout worshipper of truth, the philosopher appeared far more intent on settling the price of his lectures, than anxious about communicating clear ideas on the sublime topics about which he was questioned. Disgusted with this appearance of sordid care in one whom he had expected to see wholly intent on contemplation, Justin next applied to a Pythagorean. But it required, he found, a long course of preparatory study before he could approach even the threshold of the mystic temple in which his master described truth to be enshrined. The sciences of harmony, geometry,

* Tillemont, *Mémoires Ecclésiastiques*, t. ii. p. 11. Cave's *Lives of the Primitive Fathers*, art. Justin. These authors have collected with great care the notices of his life to be found in his own works. His works, as enumerated by Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* lib. iv. c. 11—18., are certain treatises against Marcion, Apologies to the Emperor Antoninus Pius and his Successor; two books against the Gentiles; a discourse on the Monarchy of God; another on the soul; and the celebrated Dialogue with Trypho the Jew. Others are alluded to, but not named.

and other studies of the same nature, were to furnish him, it was said, with the golden key to the sanctuary ; and it is not likely that Justin would have sickened at the idea of any exertion, had he placed faith in the assurance that the knowledge he required was to be gained by such means. But he had imperceptibly, or without a master, acquired sufficient acquaintance with his own nature, and that of truth, to perceive that this method promised no satisfactory results, and he attached himself to a Platonist. The great advantage he derived from this change of masters was the freedom he now enjoyed from the trammels of either a selfish or a material philosophy. His mind was fairly let loose : and though he felt as bewildered as ever, when striving from the infinity of the universe to abstract the idea of a God, whom he might not only adore, but know and hold communion with, and love ; there was a consciousness in his mind that, though he could discover nothing satisfactory without greater helps than he possessed, he was not altogether wrong ; and that solitude and reflection were every day preparing his heart for the better appreciation of the truth, should he ever discover it.

It was while his mind was in this state, that, as he was one day wandering on the sea-shore, wrapped in deep meditation, his attention was attracted by the appearance of an aged man, whose dignified and venerable countenance inspired him with profound respect. They entered into conversation ; and, in answer to Justin's expression of his desire to become acquainted with the Deity, the old man warned him against the fallacy of resting his hopes on any system taught by the philosophers, and directed him to study the Hebrew prophets, and the doctrines of Christianity, and to pray with earnestness that light might be given him to understand these things, which could only be comprehended by the assistance of God himself, and the Saviour. Having thus counselled him, the venerable old man took his leave, and Justin never again saw him. He had heard, however, sufficient to guide him to the truth and his con-

version to Christianity afforded the church a species of defence, which its present exposure to the taunts and sophisms of the pagan philosophers was daily rendering more necessary.

Justin is stated to have become a Christian about the thirtieth year of his age. From that period he appears to have constantly employed himself in expounding or supporting the doctrines he had embraced. In Egypt, and various provinces of Asia, he proclaimed them with a zeal becoming one who had embraced them from conviction, and whose mind was taught continually to venerate them more and more from the influence he beheld them exerting on those who not only professed them, but suffered for their sake. While at Rome, in the reign of Antoninus Pius, he undertook a confutation of the Marcionites and others, who were then disturbing the peace of the church; and, in the year 140, addressed to the emperor his celebrated *Apology for the Faith*. He soon after this returned into Asia; and, at Ephesus, held that conversation with Trypho the Jew, in which we are made acquainted with the circumstances that led, as above related, to his conversion. But his duty again called him to Rome, where he disputed with the philosopher Crescens, and wrote a *Second Apology*, which he presented to the emperor Marcus Antoninus, who was now pursuing those measures against the Christians which were in vain opposed either by the suggestions of justice, or by plain and honest argumentation. Justin had continued to wear the habit of a philosopher, and it might have been expected that the emperor would have paid some respect to his character and learning; but the disputants whom he had defeated were not likely to represent him in the most favourable light to their master, and he was apprehended on the charge of being a Christian, soon after presenting his *Second Apology*. The prefect Rusticus, before whom he was carried, asked to what species of study he had applied himself. "I have endeavoured," was the reply, "to acquire every species of knowledge, and have,

at last, embraced the doctrine of Christianity, — rejected though it be by those who are in blindness and error.” — “What, wretch!” exclaimed the prefect, “you follow that doctrine?” — “Yes,” replied Justin, “and with joy, because I know it to be true.” The magistrate then enquired where the Christians were accustomed to assemble? “Where they wish, and where they can,” was the firm and prudent reply: “do you think we always assemble in the same place? The God of the Christians is not confined within an enclosure; but, as He is invisible, and fills heaven and earth, the faithful praise and adore Him in every place.” Rusticus then turned to those who had been apprehended with Justin; and, their replies tending to the same end, he exclaimed, — “Sacrifice, then, and obey, or I will order you to be tormented without mercy.” — “Our only desire,” replied Justin, “is to suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ. We shall thereby obtain salvation, and derive confidence to appear before the terrible tribunal of the Lord, to which all men, at his appointed time, will be summoned.” These sentiments were repeated by the rest, and the prefect immediately directed that “those who had refused to sacrifice to the gods, and to obey the edict of the emperor, should be scourged and beheaded, as the laws ordained.”*

The piety of Justin is unquestionable, and there can be little doubt but that he greatly contributed to bring the doctrines of Christianity under the notice of men who had before regarded it with contemptuous indifference. Doubts, however, have been justly entertained, whether he did not allow his habits of philosophising to interfere sometimes with that simplicity of doctrine which it was of the utmost importance to preserve uninjured. In his style, on the contrary, he was remarkably free from the slightest tendency to affect wisdom of speech; and it has been observed of him, that though he was perfectly skilled in every species of knowledge, he took no care to adorn the natural beauty of philo-

* Fleury, *Histoire Ecclés.* lib. iii. n. 57.

sophy with the artificial ornaments of eloquence, and that his discourses, in consequence, "though very learned, have little eloquence or grace."

In the summary given of his doctrines, the points to which our attention is chiefly drawn are, that in his explication of the doctrine of the Trinity, he was considerably influenced by the Platonic notions; that he believed the souls of men would not enter into their final state of happiness or misery till the day of judgment; but that they would, to a certain degree, be conscious, during the interval, of the rewards or punishments they were destined to receive; and that he advocated the opinion, that the redeemed would, after the resurrection, dwell for 1000 years in Jerusalem. In addition to this, it is observed, that "he seems to have thought that the souls of the wicked should at last become capable of dying, although, in other places, he affirms that their torments shall be eternal; that he has a peculiar opinion concerning the souls of the righteous, which he affirms to have been, before the coming of Jesus Christ, under the power of the devil, who could cause them to appear whenever he should think fit; that, according to Irenæus, he has asserted, that the devils were ignorant of their damnation until the coming of our Saviour, and even goes so far as to say that they are not yet thrust down into eternal flames; and, lastly, that he seems not to despair of the salvation of those among the Gentiles who have lived virtuously, though they had not the knowledge of Jesus Christ, but only of God."* Many of these opinions, however, were not peculiar to Justin, but were beginning to form part of the general creed, and may, in some respects, be regarded as the consequence of that natural disposition in the human mind to make whatever knowledge it possesses a stepping-stone to farther enquiries, without paying due attention to the circumstances of the case; or questioning, whether, as in natural science, there

* Du Pin, *Bibliotheca Patrum*, art. Justin.

be any possibility of discovering, from what God has revealed, that which He has not revealed.

Polycarp had been instructed in the knowledge of the gospel by St. John, and was appointed by him to preside over the church of Smyrna. On the death of the apostle, his acquaintance with the truth, and his experience, pointed him out as the chief person whom the Christians of Asia had most reason to look up to as their father and counsellor. About the year 160 he proceeded to Rome, to confer with Anicetus, the bishop of that see, respecting the fit time for keeping the festival of Easter, and though they could not come to the same conclusion on the subject, their respect and affection for each other were exhibited in every possible manner, and their moderation and charity presented an example which it would have been well for the church of Christ had their successors followed. The labours of this venerable man were duly appreciated by the people over whom he was placed; and Irenæus, who owed to him the instructions by which he was himself rendered a distinguished ornament of the church, has left an affecting record of his virtues. "I have yet present to my mind," says that father, "the gravity of his demeanour, the majesty of his countenance, the purity of his life, and the holiness of the exhortations with which he fed his flock. I almost think that I can still hear him relating how he had conversed with St. John, and with many others who had seen Jesus Christ, and repeating the words he had received from their lips, and the accounts they had given him of the Saviour's miracles and doctrines, while his zeal for the purity of the faith was such, that when any error was advocated in his presence, he was wont to close his ears and to retire, exclaiming, 'Merciful Lord, for what times hast Thou reserved me?' Although I was then young," continues Irenæus, "I remember the blessed Polycarp so distinctly, that I could still point out the place where he was seated when he preached the word of God. Through the mercy of the Lord, I heard even

then with extreme attention the weighty things which he uttered. I engraved them not on any tablets, but in the depth of my heart, and God has ever given me grace to remember them, and to recall them often to my mind."

At the period when the persecution which had been excited by the emperor threatened the Christians of Smyrna, Polycarp must have been in extreme old age, and had, it is supposed, presided over that people between sixty and seventy years.

Of the noble manner in which this venerable servant of Christ ended his days, a particular account exists in the letter written by the church of Smyrna to that of Philomelium, a city of Lycaonia.* From this valuable document we learn, that shortly before his apprehension, several of the Christians, inflamed with indiscreet enthusiasm, voluntarily presented themselves before the heathen governor; and that, while some suffered the extreme penalty of confession, others found their faith give way in the dangers they had provoked, and apostatised. The aged bishop, more influenced by this circumstance than by the persuasion of his friends, consented to retire to a small country-house, a short distance from Smyrna, where he spent his time in prayer, and in exhorting those who visited him to preserve their piety and fortitude unshaken. But, at length, the passions of the populace, inflamed at the resolution with which many of the Christians suffered, prompted them to demand the sacrifice of the bishop; and one of his attendants, having been tortured into discovering the place of his retreat, a strong party of guards was sent to seize his person, and bring him to the stadium. They did not reach his dwelling till late in the evening, and after he had retired to bed, but on being informed of their arrival, rejecting the intimation of his attendants that he might still escape, he went down stairs, and addressed them with so much kindness and

* Eusebius quotes Irenæus for the principal circumstances which he mentions respecting Polycarp, *Hist. Eccles. lib. iv. c. 14.*; see also Dupin, *Bibliotheca Patrum*, art. Polycarp, and Fleury, *Hist. Ec. lib. iii. n. 49.*

suavity that they repented, it is said, having undertaken the office, and observed that it was a useless thing to apprehend so aged a person.

After having received them in this charitable temper, he ordered refreshments to be brought, and requested that they would suffer him to spend one hour in uninterrupted prayer. This desire was granted; and, enfeebled as he was with age, he continued standing for two hours pouring forth his devotions in a strain which deeply affected and strengthened most of those who heard him. His prayers being ended, he was put upon an ass, and conducted towards the city, but was met on the way by one of the magistrates, who, knowing something of his virtues, pitied his situation, and invited him into his carriage. The compassion, however, of the heathen was quickly dissipated; for finding the bishop persist in rejecting to acknowledge the gods, he pushed him violently to the ground, and left him to his fate. Polycarp had his thigh severely injured by the fall, but showing no mark of resentment, he once more quietly resigned himself to his guards, and continued his journey to the stadium.

The greatest excitement was manifested on his appearance; but in the midst of the deafening clamour which arose, some of the Christians heard, it is said, a voice which they believed to come from heaven, and which said, "Polycarp, be strong and endure unto death!" When he approached the tribunal, the proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp; and on receiving an answer in the affirmative, he began to advise him to have pity on his own great age, and to invoke the gods, or swear by Cæsar, or exclaim (alluding to the Christians whom the heathen so named), "Take away the atheists." To which the bishop replied with a grave aspect, by waving his hand towards the pagan multitude, and saying, "Take away the atheists." Not deterred by this, the proconsul continued, "Swear, and I will release thee; curse Christ!"—"Eighty and six years," replied the venerable man, "have I served him,

and he hath never injured me. How can I blaspheme him to whom I owe my salvation?"

Some farther conversation of the same kind took place between the bishop and his judge, but it ended by the proconsul's directing the herald to proclaim that Polycarp had confessed himself a Christian. On hearing this, the multitude, among which were a large body of Jews, expressed their desire that he should be exposed to the wild beasts; but, as it was not the season of the public games, that wish was not granted them. They then exclaimed, "Let him be delivered to the flames!" to which the judge assenting, both Jews and heathens ran immediately to the baths, and to different shops in the city, to obtain wood for the pile, which was constructed with almost incredible haste.

All things being thus prepared, Polycarp divested himself of his robe, and cheerfully ascended the pile, observing to those whom he saw preparing to nail him to the stake, that such precautions were unnecessary, as He who gave him strength to endure the fire would enable him to remain firm at the post. His hands, therefore, having been simply bound behind him, he prayed with great energy that God would be pleased to accept the sacrifice he was there offering, thanking him at the same time for his having counted him worthy of receiving his portion among the martyrs. When he had said, "Amen," light was set to the wood, and the fire ascended with great fury; but, according to the relation given by the persons who wrote the Epistle from the church of Smyrna, and who were present at the spectacle, the flames swelled round the martyr in the form of an arch, or of a sail filled with wind, and were as a wall around him, his body having the appearance not of burning flesh, but of gold and silver refined in the furnace; while a fragrant smell, like that of frankincense, or some other precious perfume, filled all the air. On witnessing this singular circumstance, the pagans desired the men who had charge of the execution to despatch the martyr with a sword; which being done, the

blood which flowed from the wound extinguished the fire, and the body of the holy bishop remained unconsumed. The Jews and others, however, suggesting that his people might come and take it, in order to honour it as they did that of Christ, the centurion ordered it to be burned: but the bones were collected from the ashes of the pile, and being regarded, it is said, by the faithful of Smyrna as more precious than gold or jewels, they were deposited in a proper place, "where, if it be possible," continue the authors of the letter, "we shall meet, and the Lord will grant us in joy and gladness to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom, both in commemoration of those who have wrestled before us, and for the instruction and confirmation of those who come after us."*

In the midst of the barbarous persecution thus carried on against the Christians, from one quarter of the empire to another, a pestilence broke out which desolated the provinces of both the East and the West. Many regarded this affliction as a visitation of divine justice. It produced, however, no change in the disposition of Marcus; but a circumstance occurred, in the year 174, to which tradition has ascribed the alteration in favour of the Christians, which, it appears, undoubtedly took place about this period. During his campaign against the Quadi, a people of Germany, he one day found himself surrounded by the enemy in a situation from which retreat was impossible.† At this

* The interesting document which has furnished the above particulars is universally allowed to be genuine; as is also his epistle to the Philippians, his only remaining production. The greater part of the former is given by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles. lib. iv. c. 15.*; but it is to be found complete in Le Clerc's *Patres Apostolici*. Jortin has examined, with his usual acuteness, the several particulars of the narrative. He admits the probability that so holy a man would be prepared for his sufferings by a vision; but expresses doubt as to the miraculous nature of the yielding of the flames, the sweet smell, &c. *Remarks on Eccles. Hist. vol. i. p. 310.*

† Eusebius says, *Hist. Eccles. lib. v. c. 5.*, that this occurrence was related by several authors worthy of credit; and not only by Christian but heathen authors, who acknowledge the wonder, though they did not attribute it to the prayers of the Christians. Valesius, in his notes on this passage, invalidates the testimony of his author; showing that there was no authority for tracing the name of the thundering legion to this event. Mention, however, is made of the occurrence in so many authors, that the substance of the relation as above given is no doubt correct. Mosheim has summed up the arguments with great care, and is followed by Lardner. Le Clerc strongly opposes the narrative. *Eccles. Hist.*

juncture, some Christian soldiers, who formed part of the *Legio Melitina*, fell on their knees, and prayed for delivery to the true God. Their supplications were answered. The enemy was discomfited by a fierce storm of hail and lightning, beating full in their faces, while the fainting legions recovered strength and spirit from the copious rain which supplied them with refreshing moisture. The victory which followed appears to have been on all sides ascribed to divine interference ; but, while the Christians believed it to be the consequence of their faith and devotions, the pagans praised their gods for their triumph ; and the monument which was raised to commemorate the event bore the figure of Jupiter Pluvius. A story was fabricated from the simple relation of the event, which gave an air of absurd fiction to an occurrence about which there seems no reasonable cause for doubt. Not satisfied with allowing that the sudden storm might discomfit the Germans, the authors of this new version of the history pretended that they were dispersed by an army in the air, to which they thence gave the significant title of the thundering legion.

The probability is, that the emperor was not less struck by the suddenness of his delivery than the army ; and, disposed as he was to piety, he would not unwillingly ascribe it to divine interference. Imperial vanity, even without any aid from religion, might have led Marcus Aurelius to this belief ; but with that vague feeling which the worshipper of many gods must ever have when he would be grateful for assistance, it was natural for him to place some credit to the side of the Christians, and to make them, for a while, less obnoxious to public justice. Some doubt is entertained respecting what is related of the mode in which he relieved the Christians from the oppressions they had so long suffered. The common account is, that he passed the law by which to accuse a Christian was made a capital crime ; and a well authenticated instance is on record illustrative of its practical effects. A person of

rank, named Apollonius, was, a few years after, accused by his slave of being a Christian, and, according to the law just mentioned, the slave was condemned to death. So imperfect, however, was the protection which Apollonius himself derived from the law, that, being questioned as to his faith, and acknowledging that he was a Christian, he was straightway ordered for execution.

It has been justly observed, that it is scarcely credible a prince like Marcus Aurelius should have passed so absurd an edict, when he might have made an effective one in four words, "*Nolumus Christianos amplius vexari*;" and that the same surprise may be reasonably expressed at the informer's having ventured to accuse his master, knowing, as he must have done, had the law stood as is represented, that death would be the consequence. There seems reason, therefore, to believe, that some mistake must have been committed on this subject; that the slave fell by a law which had been for some time in existence to prevent the increase of delators, or informers; and that Apollonius himself was convicted on the strength of the unrepealed edicts of Trajan. Certain it is, that Marcus renewed his persecution of the Christians, and that, for some time previous to his death, they suffered the same oppression which they had experienced before the German war.*

About the year 177, we find the scourge of persecution carried into France, where the infant churches of Lyons and Vienne were exposed to as severe a trial as any that had been experienced by their brethren in the East. It is remarked, throughout the early history of Christianity, that the populace formed, in the several countries where it was established, the fiercest and most

* Le Clerc, Hist. Eccles. p.744., has controverted the greater part of this statement; and Tertullian, from a passage in whose Apology the supposition of the emperor's clemency has been mainly taken, is said to have confounded the edict of Antoninus Pius with the ordinances of Marcus. Jortin considers that the death of Apollonius is itself a proof that the Epistles of neither Antoninus Pius nor of Marcus Aurelius are any thing but forgeries. Tillemont also rejects that ascribed to the latter; and though there appears reason to believe, that for a short time there was a pause in the persecution, the renewal of it with so much fierceness and perseverance is an incontrovertible proof that Marcus had formed no real plan of toleration.

unrelenting of persecutors. In the instance of Lyons and Vienne this was so conspicuously the case, that the pagans would not suffer a Christian to enter the baths, to appear in any public place, or even to remain undisturbed in private houses. Their next step was to stone them wherever they could be found; and this was quickly succeeded by their hurrying them before the tribunal of the magistrate. The manner in which they were interrogated by this officer was in perfect harmony with the treatment they received from the populace; and so manifest was the injustice of his proceedings, that a young man of rank and fortune, Vettius Epigathus, who stood by, came forward and boldly offered to defend the Christians against their adversaries. The magistrate, conscious of his injustice, and knowing the respectability of Epigathus, was somewhat confused at this interruption; but, instead of allowing the young man to say a word in favour of the unfortunate prisoners, he coldly asked him if he were himself a Christian, to which Epigathus answered, with a loud voice, in the affirmative, and was immediately condemned to death.

Among the sufferers in this Gallic persecution particular mention is made of Pothinus, bishop of Lyons, who, at the age of ninety years, willingly resigned himself to the fury of the mob, which, not content with the certain prospect of his being condemned by the magistrate, dragged him round the city, and inflicted so many blows on his feeble and emaciated frame, that he died in two days. Maturus Sanctus, Attalus, and Blandina underwent sufferings too appalling in their nature to be described; and were the annals of the world not so darkly crowded as they are with similar relations, we should at this time reject most of the narratives of ancient martyrdoms, as representing human nature too grossly abandoned on the one side, and, on the other, as more capable of enduring suffering than it can be proved to be by later experience. Blandina was a female slave; but neither her sex nor her low condition

prevented her from exhibiting a heroism in the defence of her faith which the noblest matrons of Rome might have been proud to imitate. From morning to night this admirable woman endured unrepiningly the tortures to which she was subjected, only repeating, as they were tearing her frame, "I am a Christian, and no evil is done among us." Even those who inflicted on her these tortures could not refrain from expressing their astonishment at her fortitude, and, at last, confessed that they had exhausted every mean of inflicting agony, and to no purpose.

It is not the least revolting of the circumstances attending persecution on account of religion, that we never meet with any instance of those sudden bursts of generous feeling which occasionally cast a gleam over conflicts between man and man undertaken from other causes. Fortitude, valour, and fidelity, exemplified in civil strifes, have more than once made resentment turn from her purpose, and won the praises of an enemy. But the same virtues exhibited in support of religious truth have only served to augment the virulence with which the strong have oppressed the weak, and to make power appear, in such cases, the more decided enemy of truth and justice. This was strikingly shown in the case of the slave Blandina. Though her fortitude had extorted something like admiration from her persecutors, and they acknowledged that never before had they seen a woman so suffer, she was put into a net and cast before a wild bull, by whom, after some minutes of additional torture, she was at last destroyed.

Nor did the painful deaths to which they put their victims satisfy them; but, enraged, as it seemed, that they could no longer make them feel torture, they exposed their bodies to the dogs, and, gnashing at them with their teeth, employed all the arts which an impotent fury could invent to insult those who remained to mourn over them. The writers of the epistle from the churches of Vienne and Lyons to their brethren in Asia, speak in a deeply pathetic manner of this circum-

stance. "As for ourselves," say they, "the sorrow we felt was considerably increased by our being deprived of the melancholy satisfaction of interring our friends. Neither did the darkness of night, nor our prayers, nor offers of reward, avail us. They watched the bodies with unremitted vigilance, and seemed to consider the depriving them of sepulchre as an object of importance. The bodies of the martyrs, therefore, having for six days been treated with every mark of contempt, were at last consumed by fire, and their ashes scattered upon the Rhone, that not the least particle of them might appear on the earth any more. And they did these things," conclude the writers, "as if they could prevail against God, and prevent their resurrection, and that they might deter others, they said, from indulging the hope of a future life."

A. D.
180.

Commodus, the son and successor of Marcus Aurelius, presented a strange contrast to his father. He was as vicious in his conduct as his predecessor had been virtuous; but, guided by the persuasions of his favourite Marcia, prevented the enemies of the Christians, to the utmost of his power, from doing them injury. The church was hereby blessed with a tranquillity which it had rarely enjoyed, and its boundaries were considerably enlarged. Many men of distinction owned their conversion to its tenets; and such was the importance and respectability which it now daily acquired, that the contempt with which the pagan multitude had hitherto regarded it every where began to give way to a strong feeling of fear and jealousy. But the reign of Commodus was too short to confirm this promise of peace. That licentious prince was murdered in the year 192; and the venerable Pertinax, cut off, after the reign of a few months, by the haughty pretorians, left the empire to be desolated by an obstinate civil war. Of the four claimants to the imperial throne, Severus was the successful aspirant. The agitation of civil strife prevented for a while any systematic attention to religious affairs: there were parts, however, of the em.

pire in which private malice and magisterial tyranny still glutted themselves with Christian suffering, and continued to warn the followers of the Redeemer, that many trials would yet have to be endured before their faith should be seen triumphant over pagan cruelty and superstition.

But the internal state of the church at the close of the second century could not present any discouraging prospect, when the spirit of faith and devotion were sufficiently strong to produce such examples of constancy as those just contemplated. We find many of its pastors and rulers joyfully resigning their lives for the sake of their flocks, and the glory of their great Master. Their moderation was known to all men; and their ready self-denial exhibited itself in their unostentatious mode of living, and the charitable zeal with which they ministered to the wants of the necessitous. A communion of faith and spirit was to the whole body of Christians a bond of brotherhood. It was not yet forgotten that love was the keystone of the evangelical system, and that the ornaments of the temple were to consist solely in the instances and manifestations of that divine grace. But grateful as is the general prospect presented to the eye of the Christian, it is not free from indications of a decline in purity and simplicity. A disposition to contentiousness is discoverable in the writings of several of the fathers; while the institution of ceremonies, for the purpose of conciliating the world, proves that the energy and blessing of the Divine Spirit were no longer trusted as alone sufficient to produce conversion. Several of the heretics, of whom mention is hereafter to be made, boldly accused the orthodox of being lax both in discipline and morals; and though it is to be remembered that the accusation comes from an enemy, it is plain that they considered the church could no longer oppose them on the plea of primitive sanctity.

With respect to the government and general service of the church, we learn from the writings of Tertullian,

and other ancient fathers, that each congregation had its bishop or president, its presbyter and deacons. How the former was appointed has been the subject of many and long controversies; but the best-supported opinion seems to be, that he was elected by the clergy and people conjointly. That the bishop was distinct, both in rank and office, from the presbyters, appears proved by the almost universal testimony of antiquity*; but, on the other hand, nothing can be more jejune or false in principle than the use which has been sometimes made of this fact. The head of a small independent body of Christians, whose only allowable claim to the office was superior wisdom and spirituality; who had no revenues to look for but the contributions of his people; who received his authority from them by a free election, and had no dignity among men, no desire or prospect of advancement, ought surely not to be considered in any other light than that of an example of grave and simple virtue. And here it is to be considered, that, in proportion to the weight of the arguments by which the possessors of the episcopal office are proved to be the successors of the apostles, and on which argument rests their main title to veneration, in the same proportion is their dignity proved to be wholly spiritual, claiming as its proper adjuncts perfect humility of heart, singleness of purpose, and intimate communion with Christ. To employ the expressions of ancient authors respecting the episcopal office, for the object of establishing the claims of its later possessors to temporal honours or authority, is a wilful perversion of the truth; and it is scarcely too much to say, that the eagerness to exalt the episcopal office in worldly respectability has been one of the prime, and most influential, causes of the miseries and decline of the church.

In addition to the three orders of the clergy, there

* Tertullian (*De Præscript. Heret.* c. 32.) says, that the order of bishops may be traced up to the apostles as its originators. Irenæus states, that there were bishops as well as presbyters in the days of the apostles. lib. iii. c. 14. Bingham (*Origines Ecclesiasticæ*) shows, that anciently they were sometimes called apostles, angels of the churches, princes of the people, patriarchs, and papæ. Book ii. c. 2.

was an order of readers ; mention is also made of deaconesses, and an order of widows. The laity in general were divided into two classes, the faithful and the catechumens, or candidates for baptism, who were not allowed at one period to say the Lord's prayer *, or to be present at discourses on the deeper mysteries of the gospel. To the rites of the church, as received from Christ, were now added such rules of discipline as appeared necessary to preserve its regularity and purity. Penance was exacted from every offending member, and was rigorously inflicted. Sackcloth and ashes, fasting and watching, days and nights spent in weeping, were essential to his re-instatement in the privileges of a believer ; and when the day was come for his new admission into the church, he was obliged to make a public confession of his sins, and await his absolution from the presiding minister.† But there were rules made in reference to public congregational worship, which were regarded even at that time by the more sensible of Christians as vain and superstitious : such was that which prescribed putting off the cloak, and washing, the hands before praying ; turning the face toward the east ; and giving the kiss of peace, at the conclusion of the service.‡ The festivals of Easter and Whitsuntide were observed with great solemnity ; but the question respecting the proper period of keeping the former, led to a dispute scarcely less violent than those which arose from the most obstinate controversies on points of doctrine. To the faithful at large it appeared right to keep the paschal feast on the eve of Easter-day ; but the Christians of Asia Minor contended for the propriety of celebrating it on the same day as the Jews did the passover ; and it was not till the council of Nice interposed its authority, that the dispute was settled in favour of the western churches.

* Bingham, *Origines Eccles.* i. 25., quotes St. Chrysostom in proof of this singular regulation.

† Tertullian de *Pœnitentia*, and *De Pudicitia*, passim. Cave's *Primitive Christianity*, part iii. c. 5., and Bingham.

‡ Tertullian de *Oratione*, c. 14.

Heresy, as it has been stated, had made its appearance in the church at a very early period ; but it was in the present century that the seeds were sown of those numerous errors and controversies which agitated for so many hundreds of years the professors of Christianity. The gospel is only simple in its doctrines and precepts to the eye of profound and spiritual faith. When approached by a proud or curious reason, it presents a field abounding in objects calculated to excite speculation ; and no surprise, therefore, is to be felt at finding that, as it attracted the attention of mere scholars and men of the world, of speculators and enthusiasts, it furnished a foundation for many novel systems, more or less diverse from the rule of Divine Revelation. Our space will not allow of more than a brief mention of the errors which were thus introduced into the world under the apparent sanction of inspired truth ; but a bare enumeration even of the names of the sects which appeared in the first three centuries, would convey to the reader a painful conviction that it was not persecution alone which the church, or its sincere supporters, had to fear.

Little is really known of the opinions of those who are named as the originators of heretical divisions. Simon, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, and Carpocritus, compose the list of primitive schismatics, as it appears in the writings of Irenæus * ; while to these Epiphanius and Augustine add the sects of the Nicolaitans, and the Gnostics. Of the former, the best known is Basilides, who lived in the time of Adrian ; and from the account of whose opinions, in the works of ancient authors, it appears that they sprung immediately from a philosophical theory badly interpreted by Christian expressions. “ Extending his doctrine beyond all bounds,” says Irenæus, “ he stated that *Nous*, or the Intellect, was born from the Eternal Father ; that from this sprung Logos ; from Logos, Phronesis or Prudence ; from

* Irenæus, lib. i. c. 23. Eusebius, Hist. Eccles. lib. iv. c. 7. Tillemont, Eccles. Mem. Beausobre, Histoire des Manichéés, tom. ii. c. 32. 37. Lardner's Hist. of Heretics, book ii. c. 1.

Phronesis, Sophia and Dunamis, or Wisdom and Power ; from Wisdom and Power, Virtues, Principalities, and Angels, which he terms primary, and says, that from them the first heaven was made ; that they also sprung from them, and another heaven like the first ; that from the last was derived a third heaven, and thence a fourth, new heavens and new races of angels arising from these in 365 progressions. But Basilides did not stop with this metaphysical speculation. He affirmed that the Eternal Father was not the God of the Jews, but that their supreme ruler was only the chief of the angels who upheld the lower sphere ; that Christ, the son of the Eternal, did not suffer ; but that Simon of Cyrene, who bore the cross, was crucified in his stead, having been transformed into his likeness, while he also took the ‘ shape of Simon.’ ” *

The doctrines of Basilides have been differently viewed by different scholars, and some of the apparent absurdities explained away † ; but it is plain that they had little connection with the truths of the gospel, and that their author derived his chief dogmas from the ancient philosophers, only blending them, as he saw fit, with Christian theology. Cerinthus is placed by theologians in the first century ; but he appears to have held some opinions very similar to those of Basilides, as that the world was not created by the Supreme God, but by an inferior power ; while, in respect to the person of the Saviour, he supposed that the Christ and Jesus were two separate persons ; that it was only Jesus who suffered, and that the Christ who had descended upon him in the shape of a dove at baptism departed before his crucifixion. ‡

Of the errors, or rather follies, of the Adamites, the Marcosians, the Cainites, the Ophians, and others of the same class, it is not requisite to say more than that they sprung up in the early part of this century, and

* Irenæus, lib. i. c. 24.

† Beausobre, Hist. de Manich. t. ii. p. 9. Lardner's History of Heretics, book ii. sect. 2.

‡ Lardner. Fleury.

were distinguished by superstitions and practices the offspring of weak reasonings and prurient imaginations. Cerdon, like the heretics already mentioned, believed that the God of the Jews was not the Supreme Deity, rejected the Old Testament, and asserted that the body of Christ was not a real body. He was succeeded in the support of these opinions by Marcion, who lived before the middle of the century, and was a native of Sinope, in Pontus, of which place his father was bishop. On account of some indiscretion committed in his youth, his father excommunicated him; and, notwithstanding many evidences of repentance, refused to remove the ban. This drove him to Rome, where he endeavoured, it is stated, to raise himself to the episcopal office; but having failed, joined the party of Cerdon.* Some particulars in this statement are controverted by writers on the subject of his heresy†; but from the account given of his doctrines, it appears that he believed that the maker of the world was inferior to the Eternal Father; that he defended the notion of two, three, or four independent principles, and especially the eternity and independence of God the Father, and of matter.‡ Respecting the person of Christ, he taught that he had only the appearance of a man, and that he showed himself for the first time in Galilee, in full growth. To this he added, that the Christ who came for the salvation of the world was not the same as the prophets foretold should come for the delivery of the Jews; but he allowed the reality of his miracles, and of his resurrection.

It is generally admitted, that the morals of the Marcionites were unobjectionable; and that they even contended for a system of discipline more strict and adverse to human passion than was received by the generality of Christians. The same may be said of the Montanists, who arose about the year 170, and owed their

* Epiphanius, *contra Oct. Hæreses*, § 42. Beausobre, *Hist. de Manich.* tom. ii. p. 77.

† Lardner, *Hist. of Heretics*.

‡ See Tertullian's account of this heresy, *adv. Marcion*.

origin to Montanus, a native of Ardaba, in Mysia. This celebrated heretic assumed to himself not merely the character of a prophet, but that of the Paraclete or Comforter. The doctrines he taught do not appear to have materially contradicted those of the church; but he pretended that neither in its fasts, penances, nor general discipline, it came up to the rule of the gospel. Tertullian, who joined this sect, has warmly defended its principles; and from his works the fairest judgment may be formed of its pretensions.*

But of all the ancient heresies, the most celebrated, and the most extensive in its ramifications, was that of the Manichees. This remarkable sect had its origin with Manes, who is stated to have been a Persian, and a slave by birth, but to have received a liberal education through the kindness of a widow woman to whom he belonged. Having been made free, and endowed with a considerable fortune by his benefactress, he began to teach a new system of religion, and succeeded in attracting numerous followers. The king of Persia, impressed by his learning and eloquence, received him at court, and his doctrines had spread far and wide, when his bad success in attempting to cure one of the young princes brought upon him the displeasure of the monarch, and he was thrown into prison. He escaped from the punishment which awaited him with great difficulty, and made his way into Turkestan. According to another account, it was from fear of his doctrine that the Persian monarch persecuted him; but all agree in stating, that he was in the end put to death by the most barbarous arts that his enemies could invent.†

Unlike many other authors of heretical notions, Manes was a man of great learning and very superior abilities. Nor is any charge made against his moral character; and it is highly probable that those parts of his system which stand opposed to the sublime truths of the gospel were the consequence of his study of

* Eusebius, lib. v. c. 16. Tertul. Opera.

† Beausobre, Hist. de Manich.

Eastern philosophy, and the imperfect channels through which he had originally become acquainted with Christianity. He supported the doctrine of two principles, perfectly opposed to each other, "eternal and co-eternal;" and "two natures and substances, one good the other evil."* The existence of the world, he stated, was owing to a conflict between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light; the human body to the laws of matter, or to the devil; and there were in it, he added, two souls. Like several of the heretics before mentioned, the Manichees rejected a large portion of Scripture, and thereby left themselves free to form what notions they pleased on many subjects, which those who yield implicit assent to the divine word approach with reverential caution. The doctrine of fate and free-will makes a conspicuous figure in their writings; but in juxtaposition with dogmas on this mysterious subject stand those in which they profess their belief in the transmigration of souls, and deny the resurrection of the body. Respecting our Lord, they asserted that he was truly God, but man only in appearance; and that, consequently, he neither died nor rose, except in vision.

But, composed as their system was of many wild, and some very dangerous errors, they numbered in their ranks several men of profound ability; and among others the great Augustine, who, discovering as he became more mature in mind and learning the falsity of the system, renounced its doctrines, and joined the church. From his writings we learn the true bearings of the heresy, and are guarded against the danger to which the mind is naturally exposed when viewing a system, so attractive in itself to the imagination, set forth with many graces of eloquence, and not obviously offending any moral principle. How ardently attached the favourers of the sect were themselves to their modes of worship, may be learnt from a passage in the writings of Faustus, one of their most learned associates.† "Instead," says he, "of worshipping God

* August. de Hær. c. 46.

† August. contra Faust. lib. xxix. c. 2.

as do the heathens, with altars, temples, images, victims, and incense, I serve him as a creature, who, if worthy, is himself a reasonable temple of God. I receive Christ his Son as a living image of his living majesty ; and his altar is the mind imbued with liberal knowledge and discipline.”* The members of the community were divided into the auditors and the elect ; and at their general meetings, prayer, reading the Scriptures, and the discourses of Manes, formed the sum of their religious observances. Baptism and the Lord’s supper were also performed in their assemblies, and seem in the main to have been administered according to the rule adopted by the church.

Carpocrates and Valentine, the authors of heresies which, at a very early period, obtained a standing in the world, appear to have been not less bold than Manes in their speculations, but far less powerful in intellect or acquired endowments. They were both of them Egyptians ; both professed many things in common with the Gnostics, and both mixed up with their dogmas principles essentially opposed to the practice of morality. The Paulicians approached the Manichees so nearly in opinions and customs, that they have been considered a branch of that sect † ; but they upheld certain rules of discipline and church government which sufficiently distinguish them from other schismatics : as, for example, they divided the whole sect into six churches, which they named respectively the church of Macedonia, Achaia, Philippi, Laodicea, Ephesus, Colosse, and, on joining the fraternity, the members changed their names for that of some apostle, or other celebrated Christian.‡

We may conclude these notices with the remark, that the errors of the early heretics were of two classes ; those, namely, which sprung from a mistaken view of the Jewish dispensation, and those which had their found-

* Faust. lib. xx. c. 3.

† Beausobre points out many circumstances to show that the general opinion on this subject was not correct. Hist. de Manich. t. ii. p. 765.

‡ Photius, lib. i. c. 14.

ation either in Oriental or Platonic philosophy. Their existence and increase indicate the interest which men of the acutest minds took in the subjects which the Gospel propounds for our examination; and lamentable, therefore, as were their effects in many respects, the history of their rise and progress proves, in the most convincing manner, that wherever the religion of Christ became fairly known, there were always men of ability ready to acknowledge the sublime mystery of its doctrines. That which Tacitus had contemptuously, and without enquiry, described as an execrable superstition *, thus became the most venerated of all systems in the eyes of philosophers; and before it had conquered the prejudices of monarchs, it had made learning, though its pride was unsubdued, a willing and constant tributary.

CHAP. IV.

GENERAL CAUSES OF THE OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY. — PERSECUTION UNDER SEVERUS. — MARTYRDOMS OF FOUR CATECHUMENS, AND OF VIVIA PERPETUA AT CARTHAGE. — HER NARRATIVE. — REIGN OF MAXIMIN. — PERSECUTIONS UNDER DECIUS AND VALERIAN. — DEATH OF CYPRIAN. — THE DEACON LAURENTIUS. — CYRILLUS.

CHRISTIANITY is so perfect a combination of every pure and holy principle, that no imaginable evil can exist to which it is not essentially opposed. As a developement of the divine mind, so far as its attributes can be comprehended by human thought, it is necessarily contrasted with that great principle of ill which we find diffused through a thousand different channels, and which, more or less, infecting whatever we behold, has no perfect contrast in any thing but the spirit which

* See page 25.

inspires Christianity. Thus in itself the antagonist of evil, it is not easy to imagine how it could have been made known to a world in which evil is prevalent without provoking opposition ; or how, if human beings were intrusted with its publication, they should escape the enmity and violence of their corrupted fellow-creatures. The preachers of such a system would necessarily be few ; the progress they made in the world would be slow and uncertain ; and the infant establishments would every where appear strangely opposed to the reigning institutions of the world.

To suppose that the contrary could have been the case, would be to lose sight of the distinguishing features of the religion, or to neglect the due consideration of the circumstances under which it was published. Had large and powerful bodies of men come forward at the first call of the Divine Author, the change would have been already effected in the world which was to be brought about by the operation of the new religion : but this miraculous conversion of the world was not intended by the Deity, and the promulgation of the faith being an undertaking confined to the very small body of men who willingly and thoroughly embraced its doctrines, they were necessarily exposed to the resentment of those whose principles the truths they taught were intended to uproot.

But besides these general causes of opposition, which were to be found equally in force in one part of the world and in another, the first preachers of Christianity had to encounter difficulties peculiar to their age and country, and which added considerably to the dangers with which such an office must be attended, when or wherever it is exercised. The apostles and their immediate followers, it is worthy of being noticed, appeared in Jerusalem not simply as the teachers of a new religion, but as *reformers*, a character which history will show it to have been at all times more perilous to assume than to broach a new system of belief. Had this not been the case, they would, it is probable, have met

with a much less severe treatment; and we can scarcely help discovering, either in their oppressions, or in the bitter scoffings with which the trial and execution of our Saviour were accompanied, the working of private feelings, of offended pride, of malice which had not yet digested the rebukes which put hypocrisy to shame, or the stripes with which avarice was punished for polluting the house of prayer.

The emperor Severus was himself not unfavourable to the Christians *; but the time was past when a Roman sovereign could venture on acting with justice, if justice interfered with the passions of the multitude. The sacrifice of an innocent people is the favourite offering from a weak and tyrannical monarch to a turbulent populace, a striking instance of which is presented in the circumstances of the present emperor's reign. Giving way to all the passions of his ignorant and prejudiced subjects, he allowed a persecution to take place, which not only opposed the common principles of justice but his own perception of right. Few places in the empire were free from the scourge; but it was felt most severely in the different provinces of Africa; and from the numerous incidents with which the memorials of this persecution abounds we select the following.†

A. D.
204.

About this period, four young professors were arrested at Carthage, who had just entered the congregation of the faithful as catechumens.‡ Their names were Revocatus and Felicitas, who were slaves belonging to the same master, and Saturninus and Secundulus, and with these persons was a young and noble lady, Vivia Perpetua, whose virtues rendered her an object of the tenderest love to her parents and husband. She had at the time of her apprehension an infant at the breast, and

* A full account is given of this emperor's virtues and inclination to favour the Christians in his life by Lampridius. See also Crevier's Hist. of Roman Emperors, art. Severus. The favourable idea which he formed of the Christians is said to have been owing to a cure he received from a Christian slave.

† Tillemont, Mem. t. III. p. 136 Mosheim contends that Severus did not enact a law against the Christians; this is controverted by Lardner, Testimonies of Ancient Heathens.

‡ Fleury, hv. v. n. 11.

expected shortly to give birth to another. This extraordinary woman wrote an account of the affliction she experienced between being taken from her own home to the execution of her sentence, and there are few ancient documents of a more interesting character than that which purports to be, and there is good reason to believe is, a transcript of her narrative or confession. According to this account, we learn, that she and her companions were kept under guard some days before they were cast into prison, and that in this interval she was visited by her father, who, loving her with an affection which knew no bounds, earnestly besought her to recant, and so restore herself to her afflicted family; but pointing to a vase which stood on the floor, she said, "Can you give any other name than vase to that vessel?" and on his answering in the negative, "neither," she continued, "can I call myself by any other name than that of Christian." On this the afflicted parent could no longer repress his passion, but flinging himself upon her, would, in his frenzy, have done her some serious injury; but her strength and resolution supported her, and she remained unharmed either in mind or person.

For some days she saw no more of her father, and in the interval she and the four other catechumens obtained baptism, on receiving which she earnestly besought God to give her patience in suffering. They were almost immediately after cast into prison; and in recording this circumstance, Vivian says, with the natural timidity of her sex, "I was terrified at it, for I had never been in such darkness. O fearful day! The crowd made us suffer the most oppressive heat. I was torn with anxiety about my infant." Two deacons, however, of the church, succeeded in obtaining them by means of money, a temporary removal into the more open part of the prison. "We went forth," says Vivian, "and in doing so, every one thought of his own immediate wants. I gave suck to my babe who was dying with hunger, and recommended him to the care of my

mother. I endeavoured to strengthen my brother ; but was penetrated with the deepest sorrow at seeing what they suffered on my account. Many days were passed in anxiety and restlessness ; but being allowed to keep my babe with me, I found great consolation therefrom, and the prison became a palace to me, so much so, that I preferred it to any other place whatever."

She proceeds to say, that while in this frame of mind her brother desired her to pray to God that He would let her know by some vision whether the present afflictions were to end in martyrdom ; to which she answered, that the next day he should hear something respecting it. In this age, when the mind is so rarely subject to extraordinary excitements, it is difficult to avoid confounding the belief and sentiments, which, though enthusiastic, passionate, and, perhaps, highly erroneous, are still natural and worthy of respect, because attributable to a state of feeling produced by real and sufficient causes, with those which have no assignable origin but the suggestions of a weak intellect and disordered fancy. A very wide difference, however, exists between the two cases ; and while we simply regard with pity the victims of a wild, exciting error in modern times, the visions and revelations of the early Christian sufferers inspire the reflecting mind with a feeling of solemnity not unmingled with either respect or awe, for they serve to convince us of the violent conflict which took place in their hearts before they could subdue the backwardness of nature to undergo the trial to which faith had put it, — a conflict which, it hence seems, was in many instances too strong for the mind though not for the spirit.

Neither credulity nor incredulity, therefore, has to do with the recital which the captive lady has left of her visions. They were the dreams of a mind agitated by fears which faith might overcome, but the hideous aspect of which it could not change ; and when she says, in speaking of her brother, " I told him boldly that the next day he should hear news," — and " I prayed to

God, and behold what was shown me," — we have no reason to doubt that she spoke from the perfect conviction of her heart. Her vision she describes as consisting of a very lofty ladder of gold, which reached from earth to heaven, but so narrow that not more than one person could ascend it at the same time. To the two sides of this ladder were attached every species of chains, swords, crosses, and other instruments of torture, and they were placed in such a manner that they could not fail of wounding any one who should mount the ladder carelessly, or without looking up, and below it appeared a huge dragon, which glared ferociously on all who approached. The first person she saw, ascending was Satur who, moved by the example of the catechumens, had voluntarily given himself up to the magistrate. When he arrived at the top of the ladder he turned towards her and said, " Perpetua ! I await you, but beware that the dragon do not tear you." To which exhortation she replied, " In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, he shall do me no harm." The dragon, on hearing these words, lifted up his head in a manner so gentle that he seemed to fear her, and she did not hesitate to step from the first stave of the ladder upon the huge monster. She then ascended; and her eyes were quickly regaled with the sight of a wide extended garden, in the middle of which sat a man of lofty stature, in the garb of a shepherd, and with white locks. He was milking his ewes, and was surrounded by a number of other persons, all of whom were clad in white. As Perpetua approached him he raised his head, and observing her, said, " You are well come, my daughter," and then gave her of the milk he had drawn from the flock. She received it with joy and drank it; on which all those who surrounded the pastor exclaimed, "Amen!" with the sound of which still ringing in her ears she awoke.

No doubt was entertained by Perpetua or her brother, after the former had related this dream, that martyrdom was at hand; and a day or two after its occur-

rence, the miserable father, forgetting his anger in his grief, and learning that an examination of the accused was to take place the following day, visited the prison at nightfall, and again besought Perpetua to recant. "If I have brought you up," said he, "to this age; if I have loved you more tenderly than your brothers, do not rob me of public respect. Think, too, of your mother and your aunt; think of your infant son, who cannot live if deprived of you. Cease from this pride and obstinacy, or you will destroy us all." On saying this, the old man testified by his actions that he was suffering the most terrible anguish; for, taking her hands, and covering them with kisses, he threw himself at her feet, weeping as if his heart were broken, and no longer calling her his child, but the mistress of his fate, and all that was dear to him. The only answer which Perpetua returned was, that at the tribunal that would take place which seemed best in the sight of God, for that men had no power over their own destinies.

The next day, as had been expected, the prisoners were carried before the judge, and the rest having confessed, it came to Perpetua's turn to be examined, when her father suddenly appeared before her, with her child in his arms, and drawing her aside, once more tried the effect of entreaties. Even the judge was moved at the spectacle afforded by this struggle of a parent's tenderness with the fortitude and constancy of an affectionate daughter, who could only disobey him to preserve her fidelity to heaven. "Spare the old age of your father, and the helplessness of your infant," said the magistrate. "Sacrifice for the prosperity of the emperor." -- "I will do nothing of that kind." -- "Are you a Christian?" was the next question. -- "I am," replied the dauntless woman; but as she said it, her father endeavoured to pull her by force from the tribunal, on seeing which the judge, whose forbearance was exhausted, ordered him to be driven off; and the agonised old man received a violent blow from the staff of one of the officers. -- "I felt that blow," says Per-

petua, "as if it had fallen on myself, so deeply was I affected at beholding my father so treated in his old age."

The prisoners having been sentenced to be exposed to wild beasts, they returned to their cells, and Perpetua sent to desire that her father would let her have her child again for the short interval she had to live: but he refused to part with it; and she notes it in her narrative, as a particular mercy of God, that neither she nor the infant suffered from this sudden separation. Her father, however, again visited her, and repeated his former entreaties and arguments, but with as little success; and having given the relation of a third vision, with which she supposed herself divinely favoured, she concludes her narrative, thus continued to the last evening of her life:—"This is what I have written to the eve of the spectacle. Some one else will describe, if he think proper, what happened there."

Perpetua was not the only female who afforded an example of extraordinary firmness in this persecution. One of the other prisoners, the slave Felicitas, was within a few weeks of becoming a mother; and as her situation would have kept her from being put to death so soon as her companions, she feared that she might have to suffer among common criminals. She besought her friends, therefore, that they would earnestly entreat God to grant her an immediate delivery; and her desire, in this respect, was fulfilled: but the pains she endured compelling her to moan aloud, one of the guards observed, "You complain now, what will you do when exposed to the wild beasts?"—"It is I alone," replied Felicitas, "who suffer this anguish; but at the spectacle there will be another to suffer for me, because I suffer for him."

On the evening preceding the spectacle, the prisoners were allowed a kind of feast, as was usual, it seems, on such occasions; but even this was not granted till Perpetua demanded it, in order that other Christians of the place might have an opportunity of visiting them.

This, their last supper, was eaten as an agape or love feast, as the eucharistical banquets of the early Christians were for some time called, and they endeavoured to enjoy it with as much tranquillity as the admission of the populace to see them would allow. Occasionally they addressed the pagans, warning them of their condition; and Satur seeing them anxious to view the persons of him and his fellow-captives, said, "Observe our countenances well, that you may be able to recognise them at the day of judgment."* Their fortitude did not forsake them on the following day. The men were exposed to bears and a leopard; Perpetua and Felicitas, having been enclosed in a net, were thrown to a wild cow. Perpetua met the first attack, and was flung, lacerated, to the ground; but raising herself up, she gathered her dishevelled hair in her hands and put it in order, to prevent any appearance of personal confusion. On seeing her unfortunate companion struggling, wounded, on the earth, she stretched her hand to her, and they tottered together towards one of the gates, where they were met by some Christians. At hearing the voice of her friends, Perpetua, it is said, seemed to wake out of a deep sleep, and it was only by showing her the wounds she had received, that they could persuade her she had been injured. Except Satur, who died by the teeth of a leopard, none of the martyrs appear to have expired under the attacks of the wild animals to which they were exposed: but the populace, fully resolved upon not losing the last scene of the tragedy, loudly demanded that those who were not dead should be again brought forward; and, in obedience to this desire, the sufferers were placed in the centre of the arena, and despatched by the swords of gladiators. Perpetua again distinguished herself by her extraordinary firmness. The man who had the charge

* The substance of this narrative, which purports to be the history of Perpetua as written by herself, is generally allowed to be authentic: by whom the additions were made is not known. Tillemont justly observes, that the best portion of the account is that attributed to Perpetua. See also Ruinart, *Act. Sinc. Mar.* pp. 94, 95.

of despatching her wounded her unnecessarily, by missing his aim; and finding that he was too agitated to perform his office, she took his hand, and guiding it to her throat, instantly fell beneath his dagger.

The death of Severus* put a stop to the terrific persecution, of the barbarities of which the above is but a single instance. From its termination, however, to the accession of Maximin, a period of twenty-four years, the Christians enjoyed uninterrupted tranquillity. They were persecuted by that tyrannical monarch, in different parts of the empire, through the three years he reigned; but at his death the church was again restored to peace, which it continued to enjoy for ten years, when the emperor Decius assailed it with all the force of his authority, and a degree of fury more resembling the rage of private malice than the indignation of an offended sovereign. Multitudes of both sexes, and of every age and condition, fell beneath his sword; and almost every province of the empire had its unjust judge, ready to second the will of the monarch and the ferocious disposition of the people. Such was the state of things produced by the terrors of this persecution, that those who remained faithful to their profession had almost constantly before their eyes the lamentable spectacle of some brother lapsing from the truth, or falsifying his inward conviction by sacrificing to the pagan idols.† In other cases, the pastors of different churches found it necessary to persuade their people to save themselves by an immediate flight; and the virtues of resolution and devotion were more than ever put to the proof. Among those who suffered at this time were the bishops of Rome, Jerusalem, and Antioch, while the celebrated Origen only narrowly escaped death, after enduring many severe tortures; his fame, probably, as a man of learning and a philosopher, operating on the minds of his persecutors.

* The duration of this persecution is differently estimated by different authors. Basnage states that it lasted more than six years. Ann. 202. n. 2.

† Those who thus betrayed their faith were divided into various classes, — *sacrificati*, *thurificati*, *traditores*, *libellatici*, being the appellations they severally received, according as they sacrificed, burnt incense, betrayed, or gave up the Scriptures.

This great man was born in Egypt, about the year 185, and was the son of Leonidas, a citizen of Alexandria, who suffered martyrdom in the reign of Severus. Full of fervour and devotion, Origen contemplated the fate of his father as an incentive to zeal; and fearful lest he might shrink from the trial which awaited him, on account of his mother and brothers, wrote to him in prison, exhorting him to remain firm to the last. "Take heed, father, that you do not change your mind for our sake," is the only line preserved of his letter; but it conveys, nobly, the purport of the whole. Left without any provision, he was obliged to support himself for some time by giving instructions in grammar, while pursuing which occupation he was called upon to superintend the catechetical school, the former teachers of which had fled in terror from the perils to which their situation exposed them. In order to avoid the necessity of calling upon those whom he instructed for assistance, he sold his books, and stipulated with the person who bought them that he should receive for a time four oboli, that is about five-pence, daily, on which sum he contrived to exist.* It was while engaged in the arduous office he had thus undertaken, that he committed a violence upon himself which only enthusiasm could have justified, and which he subsequently allowed was but a bad method of resisting temptations, the proper antagonists of which are prayer and divine grace. But his application and exertions were unceasing. In the midst of his labours as a teacher, he made himself master of the Hebrew language, and produced those works on the interpretation of Scripture which have obtained him the reputation of being the greatest of Christian philosophers. In the year 228, having been sent into Achaia, by Demetrius, the bishop of Alexandria, and coming in the course of his journey to Caesarea, he was there ordained presbyter. On his return to Alexandria he found himself so ill received by De-

* Eusebius, lib. vi. c. 6. Tillemont, *Mém. Eccles.* art. Origène, t. iii. p. 494.

metrius, that he resigned his office in the catechetical school, and took up his residence at Cesarea. A council was soon after summoned at Alexandria, to examine his conduct and doctrine; and through the influence of Demetrius, who is said to have been jealous of his reputation, he was deposed from the rank of presbyter. But the fame he enjoyed, and the concourse of scholars who attended his lectures at Cesarea, rendered the anathemas of Demetrius harmless. The bishop of that city, the bishops of Jerusalem, and other places, confessed that they delighted to be instructed from his lips; and the mother of the emperor Severus, in order to have the advantage of his discourse, sent for him to Antioch, and appointed a guard to attend him on his journey. He did not long survive the persecution above mentioned; his death having occurred, it is supposed, in the reign of Gallus.

Origen is the most voluminous of the early fathers*, and to him may be traced that mixture of Platonism with the exposition of evangelical mysteries, and that taste for allegorising which tended so greatly to the corruption of Christian theology. He was early charged with heresy, but has had many powerful defenders; and neither his learning nor his eloquence, neither his zeal as a teacher, nor his virtues or piety, have ever been controverted by the fiercest of his opponents. A master of every system of human philosophy, incomparably skilful in the employment of dialectics, and living in a city famed for the pride of scholarship, he held, through a long career, the even tenour of Christian resignation; and though his works are tinctured with that strong love of speculation which formed a characteristic of his mind, there is nothing recorded of him which militates with the commencement of his labours, begun as they were with the most perfect humility and devotedness of spirit.

* Jerome disputes the report that Origen's works amounted to a thousand volumes, founding his objection on the catalogue of Eusebius, which he states did not mention above a third of that number. Lardner's *Credibility*, part ii. c. 38.

In the number of those who sought safety by exiling themselves from their country was a young man of Thebais in Egypt. He was an orphan, but inherited from his parents a very considerable fortune, and his learning and piety were equal to the advantages he inherited by birth. Unfortunately, however, he was exposed to the envy of his sister's husband with whom he resided; and at the breaking out of the persecution in Egypt, his infamous relative conceived the idea of securing his destruction by informing against him as a Christian. But Paul obtained notice of the snare laid for him, and lost no time in making his escape from the house. Not knowing on whom he could depend for shelter in those days of terror, he took up his abode for a short time in a lonely country house, and from thence bent his steps towards the mountains which bordered the desert. There finding a cave which promised him both shelter and security from his enemies, he took possession of it with the intention of remaining there till the persecution should cease, and he might return to the enjoyment of his fortune with safety. But naturally of a tranquil, contemplative disposition, the silence of the desert, the freedom it afforded from care, and the uninterrupted opportunities of thought and devotion which might be there enjoyed, made him every day more attached to his cave; and by the time the persecution terminated, he had become so enamoured of a solitary life, that he gave up all idea of returning to the world, and for no less than ninety years continued to inhabit the mountains, forgotten by his race, but enjoying a tranquillity for which he paid a price far below its value, if we simply consider the sacrifice of his fortune. This is said to be the first instance of a Christian devoting himself to a life of perfect seclusion from the world; and Paul may, therefore, be looked upon as the father of that extraordinary race of men who in a subsequent age astonished the world by their solitary and austere lives.

A far less happy fate attended the greater number

of those who fled from their homes at the same time as Paul. Many of them were attacked on the road by robbers who pillaged and murdered them, and others perished of cold and hunger, as they endeavoured to drag their exhausted frames to some place of shelter. But one of the most extraordinary personages mentioned in the history of the Decian persecution, is Saint Agatha, a noble Sicilian lady, who was as accomplished in mind and person as she was remarkable for her graces as a Christian. Her beauty attracted the attention of Quintien, the governor of the province ; and his passion being still more inflamed by the exquisite sweetness of her modest demeanour, he assailed her with all the arts of a seducer. Indignant at his attempts, Agatha fled with precipitation to the town of Catana ; but Quintien, not to be thus thwarted in his designs, ordered her to be pursued, and brought back by force. Thus in his power, she was committed to the care of a woman whom he directed to employ every means for corrupting her mind ; and with this infamous pander to her persecutor's will was the pure-hearted and noble girl obliged to remain a whole month, at the end of which time her keeper confessed that all her efforts to subdue the austerity of her charge had failed.*

Quintien possessed a fit character for a persecutor. Notwithstanding his admiration of Agatha's beauty, and the feminine charms of her character and disposition, he gave way to the most violent passion on hearing that she continued firmly opposed both to his addresses, and to every proposition, compliance with which might be an offence against her religious profession. Determined on revenge, he summoned her before his tribunal, and demanded a confession of her faith. Her answers were direct and explicit. She declared that she was a Christian, and that she held in abhorrence the deities whom the pagans worshipped. As he had now an apparently legal motive for punishing the unfortunate girl, he ordered her to be conducted to prison,

* Tillemont, *Mém. Ecclés.* t. iii, p. 49.

and the next day, after repeating the mockery of an examination, committed her to the torture, and endured to see the delicate frame of the woman for whom he had expressed the most unbounded love torn with the scourge and scorched with burning irons. At the end he directed the nipples of her breasts to be cut off, and in that condition sent her back to prison.

Agatha had borne her sufferings with the firmness which she evinced in her former conduct towards the tyrant ; and though he directed that no care should be taken of her wounds, nor any nourishment afforded her, she was in a few days sufficiently recovered to be again dragged before the tribunal, and compelled to answer the interrogatories of Quintien. But not a single contradiction of the sentiments she had originally uttered could be elicited from her lips ; and, unmoved either by pity for the sufferings she had undergone with so much magnanimity, or by any admiration of her virtue and resignation, the barbarian directed his attendants to renew her tortures, by placing her on the sharp points of a machine exposed to burning charcoal. Agatha endured even this without yielding ; and on being replaced in her cell, tranquilly resigned her spirit to heaven, as pure in its Christian perfection as it had been given her.

With the accession of the emperor Valerian, the comforted Christians recovered from the panic into which they had been thrown by the savage barbarities of Decius and his ministers. But the period allowed them for recovering their strength, and preparing themselves to suffer with fortitude, was of short duration. Valerian, though originally far from being of a persecuting spirit, was too ready to receive the advice of his minister Macrianus ; and about the middle of the fourth year of his reign he commenced an attack on the church, during the continuance of which many of its greatest ornaments, both of those who were conspicuous for their public virtues, and of those who were only known to their immediate brethren by the

perfect piety of their lives, fell victims to the sword. It was in this persecution that Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, and by far the most distinguished of the early Christian writers, with the exception of Origen, received the crown of martyrdom. The conduct of this devout and strong-minded man will furnish us with a useful illustration of this portion of church history.*

Cyprian was beloved and respected by his flock for talents and virtues rarely to be found united in one man. So great was the estimation in which his character was held, that he had only belonged to the number of the faithful about ten years when he was chosen to preside over the affairs of the African church. In this situation he exhibited an equal degree of energy and discretion, resisting with a powerful hand the attempts of those who endeavoured to disturb the people by the introduction of schism, and exercising towards his flock the most devoted and fatherly affection. Even the enemies of Christianity could not help bearing testimony to the excellence of his character ; and, owing to the respect in which he was universally held, he was only punished during the Decian persecution by banishment. The letters which he wrote to the Christians of Carthage in his absence, are highly valued for the warm and enlightened piety which they so generally display ; and it is not difficult to discover, from the tone in which they are written, sufficient reasons for the love with which he was regarded by those under his charge.

Soon after the commencement of the persecution by Valerian, Paternus, the governor of Carthage, gave directions to his officers to apprehend Cyprian, and bring him to the tribunal. “ The sacred emperors,” said the magistrate, as the bishop approached the judgment-seat, “ have sent me letters containing a decree that all men are to honour the gods whom the Romans honour, and that those who refuse compliance

* Tillemont, *Mém. Eccles.* Fleury

are to be punished with death. It has been reported to me that you reject the worship of the gods: be advised, consult your safety, and neglect it no longer."—"I am a Christian," was Cyprian's reply, "and know no god but the one true God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and all that are therein. This is the God whom the Christians adore, and to whom we pray night and day for all men, and specially for the emperors."—"You will die the death of a malefactor," answered Paternus, "if you do not alter this disposition of mind."—"To fear God is a good disposition," rejoined the bishop, "and it must, therefore, not be changed."—"It is the will, then, of the emperors," continued the proconsul, "that for the present you be banished." Cyprian received this intimation with resignation, and calmly answered, "He who has God in his heart cannot be an exile; for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." Paternus next desired to be informed where the presbyters of the church resided, and whether they were at that time in Carthage; but to this demand Cyprian replied, that the Romans having themselves discouraged the practices of informers against the Christians, never desired that they should convict themselves, and that, therefore, he certainly ought not to be expected to make any disclosure respecting the retreat of his presbyters. Paternus, on hearing this, threatened to compel him to make the discovery by torture, but the bishop persisted in his refusal; and when the proconsul further observed that the emperors had forbidden the Christians to hold assemblies, on pain of death, he contented himself with simply replying, "Do as your orders direct."

To the credit of Paternus, he suffered Cyprian to depart uninjured to the place of his exile, the town of Curubis, distant not more than fifty miles from Carthage, and situated on the sea-coast. There he remained about eleven months, during which time he had to lament the fate of numerous friends both at Carthage and elsewhere, no less than nine bishops, together with

a host of the inferior clergy and lay persons, having been seized, and condemned to slavery in the mines. In writing to these his fellow-sufferers, he exhorted them to continue firm by all the arguments that can be drawn from the hope of immortality. "Let malice and cruelty," he exclaims, "bind you as they choose. You will soon pass from earth and its afflictions into the kingdom of heaven. You have not in the mines a bed which can refresh the body, but you have Christ for a rest and solace. When your limbs are wearied with fatigue you have only the earth on which to extend them; but so to lie down is no punishment for those with whom Christ abides. Your bodies are defiled with dirt, and you have no baths in which to cleanse them, but you are inwardly washed, remember, from all uncleanness. You are allowed but little bread, but man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God. You have few clothes to protect you from the cold; but he who has put on Christ is clothed abundantly."

It was thus that the good bishop sought to soothe the afflictions of his friends; and when he found himself on the point of suffering the last trial to which the enemies of truth could put him, he came forth fully armed with the fortitude which he recommended to others. His return to Carthage took place in one of the pauses of the persecution; and re-establishing himself in a little villa which he possessed near the city, he devoted his time and thoughts with the utmost diligence to the affairs of his church, which now stood in great need of attention. But he had scarcely commenced his work when the persecution broke out anew; and Valerian issued an edict which directed that all bishops, presbyters, and deacons should be immediately seized and put to death; that all persons of rank who professed Christianity should be degraded and suffer the confiscation of their property, and afterwards be punished with death, if this was not sufficient to make them recant; that women of quality should also be

degraded and sent into banishment; and that the freedmen of the emperor, who had confessed themselves Christians, should not only be deprived of all their property but be condemned to work on his estates in chains. The publication of this edict led to the speedy ruin of numerous Roman Christians, and among those who perished was their venerable bishop Xystus. Cyprian, on becoming acquainted with these transactions in and about the capital, foresaw that the storm would quickly burst upon the provinces, and with affectionate earnestness and solicitude warned his people to prepare for the trial. He himself awaited the approaching calamities with the calmness of one who had been long prepared for martyrdom, and had only sought to preserve his life for the sake of those who depended upon him for counsel. When the time of danger actually arrived, he exhibited an example to the weak by his fortitude, and to the self-willed and presumptuous by the freedom of his resignation from any appearance of enthusiasm.

The new edict having been received at Carthage by the proconsul who had succeeded Paternus, the friends of the devout prelate advised him to avoid, by flight, the peril to which he was now exposed, and offered at the same time to provide him with a place of refuge. But circumstances were changed since he some years before thought it his duty to flee the dangers of persecution. He was older, had seen many of his friends fall in the cause which they supported in common with him, and knew that did he escape he must keep himself in such close retirement that his life would be of scarce any service to the church. Rejecting, therefore, the proffered assistance of his acquaintances, he resolved to remain in his villa, which he only left for a brief space on hearing that the proconsul, then at Utica, had directed him to be conveyed to that town, which would have prevented his dying among his people, — an object greatly desired by Cyprian in common with many other eminent confessors.

At length the day arrived for his apprehension, and having been taken by a party of soldiers, he was conveyed to Sexti, about six miles distant from Carthage. The proconsul being informed of his arrival, directed the captain of the guard to take him back to the house inhabited by that officer, and lodge him there for the night; but by the time he reached his place of destination, the Christians had become generally acquainted with his apprehension, and flocked in great numbers to see him. They were permitted to converse with him for some time, and when obliged to retire, continued to linger about the door of the house, before which they passed the night watching, from a fear that some injury might be inflicted on their bishop before his trial.*

The next morning he was conveyed back to the town, to be presented to the proconsul: he arrived in the court or *prætorium* before that personage; and one of the attendants seeing him sit down greatly heated by the exertions he had undergone, civilly persuaded him to change his raiment; but the bishop observed, that it was of little use to be anxious about seeking remedies for evils which would so soon be ended. The proconsul having been informed that he awaited his judgment, soon after entered the hall, and casting his eyes on the venerable looking man, said, "Are you Thascius Cyprian?"—"I am," was the reply.—"The very sacred emperors command you to sacrifice to the gods," continued the proconsul.—"I shall not comply," firmly answered Cyprian.—"Think awhile," said the magistrate.—"A matter in which the right course is so manifest," answered the bishop, "requires no reflection."—"I pity your situation," the proconsul is reported to have further said, "and would consult your safety."—To which Cyprian replied, "I have no wish that my situation should be otherwise than that which may enable me to glorify God, and speedily obtain his

* "*Illuxit denique dies alius, ille signatus, ille promissus, ille divinus, quem si tyrannus ipse differre voluisset, nunquam prorsus valeret,*" is the glowing language in which the arrival of this day is described. *Ruinart, Acta Sinc. p. 214.*

blessing ; for the afflictions of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

These words appear to have provoked the pro-consul's indignation beyond measure. His countenance is said to have glowed with anger as he heard them ; and immediately after, having consulted a short time with the persons forming his council, he thus addressed the accused : — " You have for a considerable period past made a profession of impiety, resisting every attempt of the emperors to bring you back to their holy religion. Since, therefore, you are the head of that pernicious sect, you shall suffer as a warning to those whom you have deceived, and the discipline of the laws shall be strengthened by your blood." Having thus spoken, he took a small tablet in his hand, from which he read the sentence, which ran thus : — " It is ordained that Thascius Cyprian be put to death by the sword ;" on hearing which, the bishop devoutly exclaimed, " Praised be God !"

The Christians, who were present, could not restrain their feelings, at finding themselves on the point of losing the man who had for so many years instructed and comforted them. " Execute us with him !" they exclaimed, as he was borne away to the scene of his martyrdom, whither they and the pagans followed him in immense crowds. The place chosen by his executioners was a spot of level ground, situated about a league from the city, and bordered with large trees. The most intense anxiety was evinced by the people to witness his last moments : those who were able took their position on the lofty branches of the trees ; and the pressure was so great that Cyprian himself, fearing that harm might happen, expressed his desire that care should be taken of the several young females whom he saw among the spectators.

All was now ready for his departure, and, after prostrating himself on the earth, and praying some minutes, he took off his upper garments, placed a bandage over

his eyes, and giving the executioner twenty-five golden crowns, awaited the stroke on his knees, and with his hands crossed upon his breast. His blood was caught by handkerchiefs and napkins which the Christians, now fast multiplying their superstitious practices, had placed about him on the ground; and at night they were allowed to take his body, and inter it by torch-light, with great solemnity. The circumstances attending the martyrdom of Cyprian give us reason to believe one of these things, that is, either that the emperor had conceived the idea of gradually cutting off the principal members of the Christian church, and so leaving it to probable ruin; or that the manner in which those who were condemned suffered, depended on the different provincial magistrates by whom they were tried. If the former was the case, it may be supposed, that the emperor would be content to execute his design without having recourse to those tortures that only excite the violent passions which give greater strength, while they last, to sects as well as to individuals: in the latter case, we must believe that the character of the present, as well as of the preceding proconsul, was superior to that of most persecutors, for the one only condemned Cyprian to an easy exile, and the other subjected him to none of those sufferings which it was so usual for the persecutors to inflict on their helpless victims.*

The history, however, of this persecution is not wanting in instances of barbarity on the side of the men in power, or of fortitude on that of the Christians under the most terrible trials of their strength. Among these may be named that of the Roman deacon Laurentius, who, on seeing Sixtus, his bishop, led to martyrdom, exclaimed, "Whither go you, my father, without your son? You have never offered sacrifice without a minister, in what have I displeased you? Prove, now, whether I am

* Cyprian's works are numerous, consisting of tracts and epistles. Before his conversion he taught rhetoric; but the earnest spirit of a Christian was not injured by his early profession. See Cave, Hist. Lit. Du Pin, Bib. liot. Pat.

worthy of having been chosen by you to dispense the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." To this Sixtus replied, "A greater conflict awaits you, my son: you will follow me in three days."* The blood, indeed, of the prelate was scarcely shed, when the prefect sent for Laurentius, and said to him, "You Christians complain that we treat you with cruelty; at present I have no wish to employ torments. I ask of you something which it is in your power to grant. It is reported that in your ceremonies the bishops offer the libations in vessels of gold; that the blood of the sacrifice is received in silver cups; and that to give light to your nocturnal ceremonies you employ tapers fixed in golden chandeliers. It is also said, that to furnish the offerings, the brethren not unfrequently sell their possessions. Bring now these hidden treasures forward. Our sovereign has need of them for the maintenance of his troops." To this address the deacon replied, without any appearance of surprise or agitation, "I acknowledge that our church is rich, and that its treasures exceed those of the emperor. I will let you see the most precious of them, but you must give me three days to put them in order." The prefect expressed himself satisfied, and Laurentius immediately hastened to assemble the numerous objects of distress, the sick, the aged, the lame, and the blind, who were supported by the charity of the Christians. Having, as he expressed himself desirous of doing, put all things in order, he went to the prefect and conducted him to the church, telling him that he should see there a great court full of golden vessels, and treasures collected in piles under the galleries. On reaching the church, the magistrate looked round in vain for any appearance of the extraordinary wealth he had expected to discover, and instead of the precious vessels with the thought of which he had filled his imagination, he beheld only a crowd of miserable mendicants, under whose tattered garments none but a Christian philosopher could discover the glory of humanity. His countenance immediately indicated that he had discovered the deacon's

* Ruinart, *Acta Sinc.* p. 196.

meaning, and the latter said to him, "Why do you look angry? The gold which you so anxiously desire is but the produce of the earth, and is the cause of many crimes: the true gold is that divine light of which these poor people are the disciples. These are the treasures I promised you; employ them to the advantage of Rome, of the emperor, and of yourself." — "Is it thus that I am to be sported with?" said the prefect. "I am aware that you make a boast of despising death. I will quickly put you to the proof." *

The threat with which the magistrate left the church was speedily executed. Laurentius was seized and cast into a dungeon, from which he was only taken to be scourged, and placed over a slow fire, — a torture which he more than once suffered with unshrinking fortitude, daring the executioners to do their worst, by exclaiming, after he had been some time exposed to the flames, "I have been roasted long enough on this side, turn me on the other!" A little while after he said in the same manner, "My body is now sufficiently cooked, you may satisfy yourselves with it whenever you please." This hardihood was no evidence, perhaps, of any superior degree of Christian excellence or faith, but it is one of the many astonishing proofs which exist, that man is capable of enduring the worst tortures of the body to support the truth of principles on the assertion of which he rests the present dignity, or the future welfare of his spirit.

That this is almost a fundamental principle of humanity may be collected from the circumstance, that nearly as many examples exist of females suffering for the sake of their religion as of men. Nor are the instances of such fortitude confined to persons of mature years. Youths far below the age of manhood have been known to expose themselves to the peril of death for the purpose of expressing their entire devotion to the truths they had embraced; and a cir-

* Fleury, *Hist. Eccles.* liv. vii, n. 38.

cumstance of this nature is related in the history of the period of which we are speaking which illustrates this truth in a very striking manner. A lad named Cyrillus having been converted to Christianity, his father drove him from his house, and left him to the danger of starvation ; at length Cyrillus was apprehended and taken before the magistrate, who endeavoured by his threats to terrify him into a recantation. But the youthful confessor remained firm to his purpose ; and when the judge changed his tone, and said mildly, that if he would repent of his error his father would take him home again, and give him all he could desire, he replied that he rejoiced at being driven from his home to suffer for the honour of God ; that he should quickly inhabit a nobler and happier mansion than that which he had lost ; and that he should not fear to die to obtain a better life. The magistrate himself was moved at seeing one so young so unbending in his profession, and determined to save him from the punishment to which an older Christian would have been condemned without delay. Desirous, however, of making him recant, if possible, he ordered him to be bound and carried to execution ; but neither the appearance of the fire, nor the preparations made to expose him to its flames, had any effect upon his mind, and he was led back to the tribunal. The judge again addressed him in the gentle voice of persuasion, but it was as unavailing as before ; and Cyrillus said with firmness, “ You have done me great wrong by bringing me back ; I fear not your fire ; I shall pass through it to an infinitely more excellent habitation than any I could enjoy on earth.” Few of those most accustomed even to the scenes of misery which took place during persecutions could refrain from tears as they heard him thus express himself, in a voice the firmness of which was in singular contrast with its boyish tones. But the extraordinary magnanimity which he exhibited had no permanent effect on his judge ; for soon after uttering

the words above mentioned he was again led to execution, and put to death.*

The little estimation in which many of the Christians of this period held their lives may also be illustrated from an anecdote related of two citizens of Antioch, Sapricius a priest, and Nicephorus a layman. These persons had long cherished for each other the most perfect friendship ; but some dispute arising between them they separated, without a prospect of ever becoming reconciled. At length Nicephorus, influenced by early recollections and Christian mildness, determined to heal the schism, and accordingly sought, by every means in his power, to soothe the irritated feelings of his friend. But all his efforts proved vain ; and Sapricius and he remained apart, till the apprehension of the former, during the persecution, again induced Nicephorus to attempt a reconciliation. As his friend was led to execution, after professing his faith in the boldest manner, he ran to him in the street, and falling at his feet implored him to forgive whatever he had done to anger him ; but the priest preserved a stern silence, and the afflicted Nicephorus found all his entreaties received with disdain. Hastening, however, after the procession, he again approached his resentful friend, and repeated his solicitations, but was again rebuffed ; on seeing which the guards expressed their surprise that any one should be so anxious to obtain the favour of a man who was on the point of being put to death ; but Nicephorus answered, that they knew not what he sought from the confessor of Jesus Christ.

At length they reached the place of execution, and at the sight of the preparations which were made to separate his early and venerated acquaintance from him for ever in this world, Nicephorus renewed his appeals to the clemency and former affection of the priest. But Sapricius remained in the same temper ; and God, as it has been rightly observed, punished him for his unchristian indulgence of resentment, by depriving him of

* Fleury, Hist. Eccles. l. vii. n. 49.

the grace which had hitherto enabled him to persevere in the profession of the truth. Every thing being ready for his execution, he knelt down to receive the stroke which was to sever his head from his body ; but, just as the executioner raised the sword, he called out to him to stop, and declared that he was ready to obey the emperors, and sacrifice to the gods. Nicephorus started with astonishment at hearing these words. He had witnessed the constancy hitherto exhibited by his friend with the highest admiration, and had been induced to humble himself so deeply before him because he regarded him not only as one whose affections he wished to regain, but as a saint whose blessing would render him more acceptable in the sight of God. Many, therefore, were the sorrowful emotions which filled his mind at witnessing the fall of Sapricius. He had not only to lament him as lost, but to behold the faith and constancy of Christians put in doubt among their pagan enemies. "Lose not the crown," he exclaimed, addressing the priest, "which you have won by so many sufferings." But these words were lost, as his others had been, to the ear of Sapricius ; and, as if the spirit of devotion and truth had passed from the fallen confessor to redouble the fervour of his despised friend, Nicephorus turned to the attendants, and said, "I am a Christian ; I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, whom this man has renounced. Let me die instead of him." He was taken at his word ; and information being sent to the magistrate, he expired beneath the sword which had been raised for Sapricius.

A period of more than thirty years intervenes between the persecution of Valerian and that of Dioclesian ; and during that time the Christians enjoyed so great a degree of tranquillity, that many of the virtues which distinguished their predecessors, and enabled them to oppose the power as well as the corruptions of the whole heathen world, began to exhibit signs of decay. Ecclesiastical historians have not hesitated to ascribe the misery which afflicted the church in the latter half of

Dioclesian's reign, to the anger of God at beholding the growing corruptions among its members. This was the opinion of Eusebius*, who gives, at the beginning of his melancholy narrative, a statement of the prosperity which the Christians enjoyed after their long rest from persecution. The emperors had of late not merely tolerated them, but had appointed several of the most distinguished of their body to the government of provinces, and the highest offices of state; and with a liberality unknown to the most enlightened of preceding monarchs, had freed them from the obligation of sacrificing to the heathen deities. In the imperial palace itself, and among the nearest connections of the sovereign, were to be found numerous Christians openly practising the rites of their religion; while, instead of the private dwellings, or the small, obscure buildings in which they had so long been obliged to meet for the worship of God, they were now enabled to raise large and substantial churches in all the chief towns of the empire. But instead of their meeting the Divine mercy with thankfulness and increased demonstrations of love, the great mass of the people were daily sinking lower and lower in sensuality. Sloth, negligence, envy, discord, fraud, and malice, form the sad catalogue of sins with which the bishop of Cesarea charges the believers of this age; and the Christian will not feel disposed to contradict the conclusion to which he comes, that it was to purge the church of this bad leaven that the providence of God again exposed it to the scourge of persecution. Seldom, indeed, has a people been subjected to a severer trial than that to which the Christians were now exposed, and for which they were so ill prepared. A volume might be filled with the fearful details of this persecution, the last and the most terrible which the church suffered from the hand of paganism; but the mind of the reader would revolt from such a gloomy display of misery, and would be shocked, without being either strengthened or enlightened. It was not

* Hist. Eccles. lib. viii. c. 1.

now the conspicuous leaders of the sect, or bold, enthusiastic professors only, that suffered, as had been the case in previous persecutions; every province, both of the East and the West, was deluged with the blood of crowds that glutted the swords of the executioners, and wearied the ingenuity of the most savage hate. In one instance, a whole town in Phrygia was burnt to the ground, with its Christian inhabitants, who were too numerous to be otherwise destroyed; and, after the same principle, contrivances were made use of in the public executions to put numbers to death at once.* The origin of this cruel persecution is usually ascribed to the persuasions of the Cæsar Galerius†, who, on visiting Dioclesian in Nicomedia, about the year 302, passed the winter with him in concerting what measures might be most successfully employed against the Christians. The emperor had not, till this time, shown any dislike to this portion of his subjects; and many inmates of his palace, and even some of his nearest connections, were known to have, or were very strongly suspected of having, embraced the faith. Notwithstanding, however, his forbearance in respect to those who despised the gods and the rites of paganism, he continued himself in a superstitious adherence to all the practices of the heathens; and it is suspected that the first occasion of his conceiving a strong dislike to the Christians was his being unable one day to obtain the result from a consultation of the auguries which he desired, and his disappointment in which he attributed to one of the attendants being a believer in the gospel.

However this may be, Galerius obtained his consent, though not, it is said, till after a hard struggle with his

* Eusebius has devoted a whole work to an account of the martyrs of Palestine.

† Dioclesian, who is said not to have been characterised by cruelty of disposition, was, it appears, led into this persecution by the united artifices of the heathen priests and the persuasions of Galerius. The latter, therefore, it is contended by Mosheim (*De Rebus Christian. antè, Constant.*), ought to be considered the chief author of the calamity. To the influence of these powerful advisers, was added that of the Platonic philosophers of the school of Ammonius, who, after having derived from the Christian doctrines the noblest illustrations of their imperfect system, became the most violent opposers of the faith itself.

more humane and politic feelings, to commence the destruction of the sect ; and on the 23d of February, 303, an edict was published at Nicomedia, which condemned the Christians as outlaws, and exposed them to the sanguinary judgments of prejudiced magistrates, or the unrestrained fury of the populace.* The church, in the mean time, which they had erected for their worship in the city, was pulled down by the prætorian guards, and every copy of the Scriptures that could be found was committed to the flames.† A short time after this the imperial palace took fire ; and Galerius having succeeded in persuading Dioclesian that the Christians were the guilty cause of this disaster, the emperor became every day more determined in his enmity, and orders were sent to men of authority in all parts of the East to commence the most vigorous persecution. In order to prevent the possibility of any Christian's escaping the effects of the general outlawry, every plaintiff in a lawsuit was obliged to sacrifice before his evidence could be received by the judge. The wide scope which was thus given to the principle of destruction, brought a greater variety of characters within the verge of condemnation than had ever been the case, perhaps, with any other penal statute ; and, consequently, as it was scarcely possible that all should be put to death who came under the ban of the tyrants, the prisons were every where filled to excess, and great numbers of confessors were condemned to a punishment, worse as it seemed in their case than death, that, namely, of passing the remaining years of their existence in the mines. Several of the most venerable of the priests were thus treated, and deprived of the glory which, especially in that age, attended martyrdom. No longer allowed, moreover, to derive comfort from labouring for the good of their

* This is generally termed the tenth persecution ; but the notion of dividing the persecutions into ten, has been shown to be false by more than one historian, who have remarked, that if those of a general character only be considered, there were not so many ; and if only the lesser or provincial, that there were more.

† Mosheim conjectures, that numerous important records of ecclesiastical affairs were destroyed at the same time. De Rebus, 924.

fellow-creatures, they had to depend solely for support on the internal operations of their faith, which was thus put to a longer and severer trial than it would have had to endure either on the pile or in the arena. But it was found sufficient even for this; and weak, aged, and mutilated professors quietly resigned themselves, year after year, to the most toilsome labours.

That which chiefly contributed, perhaps, to the extent of this persecution was the firmness and enthusiasm which appeared suddenly to inspire the Christians, who, notwithstanding the errors both of customs and doctrine which, during the last half century, had been gradually making their way in the church, exhibited universally an unchanging devotion to the cause of their religion. Had it been otherwise, the politic means pursued by the emperors to exterminate the faith could hardly have failed of success; for concealment was no longer possible, and confession never escaped unpunished. Not only were the litigants engaged in a law-suit obliged to sacrifice, as above said, but little images were placed in all the most frequented public places, in the streets, by the fountains, and in the markets; and by these instruments of idolatry stood persons whose office it was to compel those who came to buy or sell, or who were even passing, to offer incense to the gods.

The conflict thus waged between the imperial power and Christian fortitude, continued without intermission for about two years, when Dioclesian and Maximian respectively abdicated their thrones in favour of the Cæsars Maximin and Constantius.* The latter prince had, while in the government of Gaul, shown himself strongly inclined to favour the faithful; and, though obliged to conform to the decrees of the emperors, so far as to pull down the churches, he had carefully preserved the people themselves from feeling the rage of his coadjutors in the government. His accession, consequently, to superior power put an end to the persecutions in the West long before it terminated in the other di-

* Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*. Fleury.

vision of the empire ; but the Roman provinces had felt the scourge some time before those of the East, and therefore suffered, upon the whole, it is probable, an equal period of violence. Maximian was the most ferocious of tyrants ; and as early as the year 286 numerous professors of Christianity experienced the effects of his rage. The most celebrated of these, if tradition is to be credited, were the soldiers of the Theban legion, which, consisting of 6600 men, the usual complement of a legion, was entirely composed of Christians. The character of these men as soldiers was in every respect worthy of praise, and there was not a band in the vast force of the Roman army that excelled the Theban legion either in discipline or valour. When Maximian, however, summoned their commander, Mauritius, to lead his regiment against the Christians of Gaul, he resolutely refused to obey so iniquitous an order, and was unanimously seconded in his refusal by the officers and soldiers of the legion. The emperor heard their protest with violent indignation, and ordered every tenth man in the regiment to be put to death. This sentence was received and submitted to without resistance, those upon whom the lot fell cheerfully resigning themselves to their fate, and those who escaped professing their readiness to die in obedience to the decree of the emperor ; but their resolution to resist unto death the command which would have made them the slaughterers of their brethren.

Finding them, therefore, still in the same disposition, Maximian again ordered the legion to be decimated, and the sentence was again put in execution, but with as little success. Mauritius and his associates in command exerted themselves incessantly to keep up the spirits and resolution of their men ; and, after the execution of the second sentence of decimation, sent a remonstrance to the emperor, which shows, if authentic, how genuine were both the piety and loyalty of these heroic Christians, and how clearly they understood the nature of their duties to God and their temporal sovereign. “ We

are your soldiers, sire," said they ; " but we are also the servants of God, and we willingly confess that we glory in being so. We owe to you service in war, but we are bound to appear innocent before God. From you we receive pay ; from him life : and we cannot obey you when to do so would be to renounce God our Creator and our Lord, and yours also, though you thus obstinately refuse to acknowledge him. If you demand of us nothing which is contrary to his decrees, we will obey you as heretofore ; if you do otherwise, we must obey him rather than you. We offer to expose ourselves to any of your enemies, whosoever they may be ; but we cannot believe that it would be lawful for us to dip our hands in the blood of the innocent. We were bound by an oath to God before we swore allegiance to you ; and you would have good reason to doubt our fidelity did you find us violating so sacred a pledge. You command us to pursue the Christians, that they may be taken and punished : behold us ! We confess our belief in God the Father of all, and in his Son Jesus Christ. We have seen our companions suffer without complaining, but have rejoiced rather at their being allowed the honour of dying for their God and our God. Neither the injustice with which they have been treated, nor the menaces hurled against us, have been sufficient to make us revolt. We have still our arms ; but we resist not, for we would rather die innocent than live with guilt."

But no declaration of loyalty, no demonstration of the most honourable adherence to principle, could make any impression on the mind of Maximian ; and, perceiving the inflexible character of the converted legion, he resolved upon its immediate and entire destruction. To effect this sanguinary purpose, says the tradition, he directed a considerable body of troops to surround it, and put every man to the sword. The Christians, on being made acquainted with the emperor's intentions, awaited their fate with resignation ; and, when they saw the regiments approaching which were ordered to act as

their executioners, they laid down their arms, and fell passive victims to the edict of their barbarous sovereign.*

The accession of Constantius to the throne of the western division of the empire put a stop to the work of destruction which Maximian had so long pursued. But in the East it was continued for six years longer; and a martyrology might be filled with the history of the professors who fell in this single persecution. For the most part, however, the pictures presented are the same from the publication of the edict by Dioclesian, to the triumph of Constantine over the intolerant spirit of his pagan countrymen. Nor does there seem to have been any diminution in the resolution of the Christians: the fire of enthusiasm, which burst out with such force at the first attack made upon them burnt with equal clearness to the last, and seemed, both from its continuance and intenseness, to spring from the very foundations of the church. It must, indeed, have diffused a warmth through the whole body, which could not soon be dissipated; for it was felt universally, and animated the meekest female and the youngest child that could pronounce the name of God, as well as the oldest and most tried professor.

Another instance in proof of the unlimited devotion of the Christians, during this awful period, may be cited from the history of one of the deacons of the church of Cesarea. That martyr, after having endured a long examination and various tortures before the prefect Asclepiades, declared that there were children even who would profess the same truths for which he was

* Fleury, Tillemont, and several other historians, have related this circumstance, and contended for its accuracy. Le Clerc, on the other hand, with Jortin and others, have rejected it as utterly devoid of truth. Jortin states that Eucherius, the earliest author who mentions it, was bishop of Lyons, and lived in the fifth century; but Dupin says, that the narrative may be more properly ascribed to another Eucherius, who was present at the fourth council of Arles in the year 524. *Bibliotheca Pat.* iii. 118. The evidence, therefore, on which the account rests, is scarcely sufficient to support so important an incident, unnamed as it is by historians who lived near the time when it occurred. It is, however, probable, that numerous as were the soldiers who had embraced Christianity, circumstances would occur during a persecution sufficiently similar to that mentioned to form some foundation for the traditions which Eucherius professes to relate. Mosheim, *De Rebus, antè Const.*, has discussed the subject with equal learning and caution.

suffering, and sustain any agony rather than deny them. Asclepiades defied the deacon to produce a child of such character ; upon which the Christian led forth a little boy named Barulas, and having asked him whether one God or many gods were to be worshipped, the child answered, that there was but one God, and that Jesus Christ was that God. The prefect, it is said, enraged at receiving this reply, asked him, in an angry tone, who had taught him to say so. " I learnt it from my mother," was the answer ; and the judge, unmoved either by the innocence or resolution of the child, immediately ordered the mother to be brought before the tribunal, and in her presence put him to the most excruciating tortures. But the same conquest of faith over nature, which had been exhibited in former instances of a similar kind, was again witnessed. While the spectators of the tragic scene either wept or trembled with horror, the mother beheld the sufferings of her child without exhibiting any sign of sorrow ; but when, fainting beneath the agony he endured without a murmur, he asked for a little water, she looked at him with a stern countenance, and told him that he ought not to desire any other than the living waters of salvation, and that crown which Christ had promised to martyrs, and had bestowed upon the children of Bethlehem.

Barulas was victorious over his sufferings ; and, persevering in his declarations of living and dying a Christian, was condemned to lose his head. It was not likely that the mother who could look upon the lingering agony of her child under torture would fail in firmness at hearing him sentenced to a speedy and easy death. Taking him, therefore, in her arms, disabled as he was from walking, she herself carried him to the place of execution, and, on arriving there, resigned him to the hands of the executioner with as much serenity as she had ever laid him on his pillow at night. But though thus firm beyond human conception, she had not lost any of her mother's fondness ; for she kissed him tenderly as she bade him adieu, only adding

“Remember me when you are with Jesus Christ, and be my protector there, though here only my child.”*

Sufficient has now been related of the early persecutions of the Christians to make the reader acquainted with the most striking circumstances by which that dark series of events was distinguished. The principal points to which we would direct his attention, in reflecting on the narrative which has been given, are those that distinguish these persecutions of Christianity from other religious persecutions either of an earlier or a later date. The primitive Christians were, it is probable, the first people in the world that ever suffered from religious motives, wholly unmixed with any of a different nature. There appears the strongest reason for believing, that, in the convulsions of the ancient world, the struggles which took place were conflicts between liberty and slavery, who set up their standards at the same time that hostile religions disputed with each other for empire. Even in the persecution which the Jews suffered under Antiochus Epiphanes, something of this kind may be discovered. The Syrian was an invader and a political tyrant, as well as a persecutor; and the Jews were at least as proud of their superiority as a nation, as they were zealous for the observance of their religious rites. Scarcely, however, had the sufferers been made to feel the hand of the oppressor, when they rose unanimously, and resisted the sword with the sword, triumphing by that fierce and stern vigour, which, when force is to be opposed by force, can only be supplied by the impulse of national spirit.

But the Christians of the first three centuries had no motive of this kind either for acting or suffering; the seed of their fortitude was in their souls, and the plant which sprang from it had no nurture but what it received from Heaven. Other seed was here and there mixed with the former, and the dew of blessing was sometimes dissipated as it fell on hot and intemperate

* Fleury, *Hist. Ecclés.* lib. viii. n. 31. Ruinart, *Acta Sinc.* p. 360., from the Hymn of Prudentius.

hearts ; but, as a people, the early sufferers for Christianity had no reasons for their conduct but those which were established on that precept of their Scriptures, that, by resigning this life for the sake of truth, they should gain one of eternal continuance. Submission to the reigning powers was a duty, to which they had been exhorted both by their heavenly Master and his inspired apostles, and they could, therefore, never feel themselves agitated by the passions which usually incite to resistance : the only part they could lawfully take in the politics of their age was to pray that they might be peaceably and quietly governed. The medium of their sentiments on such subjects was to be a prayer for all in authority ; and the only weapons with which they were to contend against the power and tyranny of persecuting rulers and unjust judges were the words, and, more frequently, only the manifestations, of holiness and resignation, which they were taught by the Divine Spirit.

This humility and peaceableness of disposition were a part of their religious profession ; and the situation in which they stood rendered the exercise of these virtues constantly necessary. They were opposed in their belief to all the nations of the earth ; but, few as they were in number, and contradictory as was their creed to that of all other men, it was the open and professed object of their lives to convert the world to their faith. Had they been of a turbulent disposition, had they been less meek in their sentiments and appearance, the hostility which was provoked by their refusal to comply with established customs, would have given birth to conflicts in which not some few distinguished members of the society would have died, setting an example of fortitude to the rest, but the whole body would have been cut off, fortitude and resignation blunting the edge of the sharpest sword, while pride and an active valour add continually to its keenness. However useful, therefore, the latter qualities may be to a people when contending with enemies to whom their physical force bears some proportion, it is on the careful cultivation of the former

that the members of a new sect must depend for their only chance of success; and thus the spirit and the maxims of Christianity required an implicit conformity of disposition in those who professed the religion, not only for their own excellency, but for the power which such a conformity would give to whatever means were employed for the diffusion of the faith. "Put up thy sword into its sheath; for he that lives by the sword shall die by the sword," was the exhortation of the Saviour; intimating, that it was not by the boldness which gives success to other enterprises His cause was to be advocated, but by an imitation of his own meekness and resignation. How well these directions were followed in numerous instances has been seen in the foregoing narrative. The refusal to recognise any other God but one was the sole cause why the persecuted Christians stood opposed to their rulers; they had no object in view by their labours but the instruction of their countrymen in the sublime truths of their faith; they had no interests, as the members of a state, separate from the rest of the citizens. The doctrines which they preached had a direct tendency to render them contented and peaceable under whatever form of government they lived; and the precepts by which they professed to be guided were positive in enjoining the utmost forbearance and charity towards the erring and unenlightened. With such feelings, the early Christians could provoke neither jealousy nor fear on the part of their opponents; for they gave no signs of ambition; were too meek to engage in treasons; too pure in their morals to afford any dangerous example, and were too intently engaged on one subject to form any alliance with the disaffected, or the broachers of any other system. As the religion for which these single-hearted and heroic men suffered became more extensively known in the world, and, under the protection of the great and powerful, was rendered respectable in the eyes of those who had no conception of its real, internal excellence, a different race of Chris-

tians grew up ; and the motives which induced men to bear the name became complicated and indirect. Interest and custom were thenceforward more frequently the parents of belief than either reason or openness of heart ; and faith thus sitting so loosely on the conscience, it was found necessary to define what was to be believed with more exactness, and to remind the careless professor of his creed by appeals to his outward senses. In the invention or support of a system which should answer the purpose of defining matters of belief, so that they might be assented to, or understood, by those who were too indolent, or too gross-minded, to receive them unless so propounded, differences of sentiment would, it is easy to see, often arise, both among those who first produced the systems and those by whom they were afterwards to be supported. The doctrines of Christianity being thus mixed with something human, and men being for the most part more ready to look with interest on what is human than on what is divine, a variety of new objects would demand their attention and reverence ; and names unknown to their fathers in the faith would be adopted, and not unfrequently preferred, to the simple appellation of Christian. The chances of disagreement being multiplied, persecution also would see new opportunities for unsheathing her sword ; and in the course of the struggles which ensued, the fierceness of the conflict was more owing to zeal for particular names than for the holiest of doctrines ; a circumstance nowhere apparent in the contest which the primitive Christians endured with paganism.

Heresy kept pace with the increase of the church ; and in this century arose the important sects of the Noetians, the Sabellians, and the Novatians. The two former respected the doctrine of the Trinity. Noethus contended that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were one and the same, or, in theological language, that there were three denominations in one hypostasis. The main distinction between this doctrine and that of Sabellius was, that the latter explained his opinion so

as to avoid the consequence of saying that the Father suffered.* The heresy of Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, chiefly regarded the person of Christ, whom he is stated to have believed to be only man. The two councils held at Antioch to repress this doctrine were the most remarkable that had hitherto been assembled.† Novatus ‡, a Roman presbyter, separated himself from the church principally on account of a question of discipline. It was his opinion that no place for restoration should be allowed to those who in times of persecution had lapsed from the faith. Cornelius having been chosen bishop of Rome contrary to his earnest wishes, he immediately put himself at the head of his partisans, and established what he considered an independent church.§

CHAP. V.

CONVERSION OF CONSTANTINE. — CIRCUMSTANCES ATTENDING IT. — STATE OF THE CHURCH AT THE TIME. — THE SCHISM OF ARIUS. — THE EMPEROR INTERFERES. — COUNCIL OF NICE. — PRINCIPAL EVENTS OF ITS SESSION. — ARIUS AND ATHANASIUS. — CHARACTER OF THE LATTER. — INCREASE OF THE CHURCH. — REMARKS UPON IT. — CONSTANTINE'S SUCCESSORS.

A SCENE widely different to those we have just contemplated is now presented to our view. Constantine, A. D. 325. the son of the mild and tolerant Constantius, had, after a long struggle with his rivals and colleagues in

* Eusebius, lib. vii. c. 5. Epiphanius, Har. 57.

† Du Pin, Bibl. Pat.

‡ Eusebius, lib. vi. c. 43.

§ Cyprian conferred with Cornelius on the subject of this heresy, or rather schism; and it has been supposed by many writers that Novatus was the same person who occasioned Cyprian much trouble at Carthage. Novatus seems to have had sufficient reason for the main subject of his complaints, but to have carried his opposition to the extreme of severity. Great abuses had crept into the church from the veneration paid to martyrs, whose recommendation was sufficient to restore a guilty person to the bosom of the church: letters were, therefore, obtained from them while expecting death, and, as they were sometimes deceived, discipline suffered from their clemency.

the state, obtained sole possession of the imperial power. That he would not employ his authority to the disadvantage of the Christians might be reasonably expected, as well from his own character as from the conduct and counsels of his father. But he had not yet professed his belief in the divine origin of their religion, or its claims to be regarded as exclusively exhibiting the truth. The circumstances which led to his openly declaring himself a convert are involved in obscurity. History, in recording the event, speaks uncertainly, and as if, while describing an occurrence of which, though neither its truth nor importance could be questioned, the attending circumstances had never been distinctly ascertained. It is stated by the historian Eusebius, that he received from the emperor's own lips an account of this mysterious occurrence ; and he informs us that the monarch ascribed his conversion to a sign seen in the heavens, and a vision which admonished him in a dream. The former appeared to him as he was marching at the head of his troops towards Rome to engage the tyrant Maxentius.* The sun was near setting, and he had just risen from supplicating the true God for aid, when turning his eyes towards the west he beheld, just above the disc of the declining orb, a broad and luminous cross, on which were inscribed the words, "By this conquer." This remarkable sign was visible not only to himself but to the whole army, who beheld it with not less awe than astonishment. The impression, however, which the occurrence made on the mind of the emperor was vague and uncertain, and he began to doubt what the appearance in the heavens was intended to signify. He was not suffered to remain long in this state : in the midst of many anxious thoughts upon the subject he fell asleep, and in the silence of night Christ appeared to him bearing a cross like that which he had seen in the sky, and commanded him to frame one of the same shape, and use it for his standard in battle. With the first dawn

* Eusebii, De Vitâ Constant. lib. ii. c. 28, 29.

of day the monarch summoned around him the most skilful workmen in gold and gems, and, sitting in the midst of them, described in exact terms the form in which the sacred banner, or labarum, was to be made.

Eusebius, anticipating the objections which it seemed probable would be started to this story, observes, that its truth might have been doubted had it proceeded from any other lips than those of the emperor himself; but that he had several years after repeated the account to him, and affirmed the correctness of the circumstances as above related with the most solemn oaths. This argument is sufficient, we may consider, to prove that either some extraordinary occurrence really took place, or that the mind of Constantine was strongly predisposed, at the period just preceding his conversion, in favour of Christianity. The doubts which have been raised respecting the truth of the miraculous appearance are chiefly founded on the want of numerous historical testimonies to the relation, and on the known fact that Constantine, though converted outwardly, and in name, remained to the close of his days contented with the imperfect condition of a catechumen.* But, on the other hand, the solemn manner in which he asserted the fact to Eusebius, and the credit due to the veracity of that author, ought not to be regarded as of little weight; and though it is easy to assert that Constantine pretended to have seen the miraculous cross simply for the sake of attracting the attention of his subjects, the utter insufficiency of such a relation to produce any assignable effect of an important kind, may be stated as an equivalent suggestion in favour of his honesty. Unless, however, we reject the narrative altogether, we are obliged to admit one or the other of the statements above made; that is, that the miraculous cross was really seen, or that the mind of Constantine was so strongly predisposed to the re-

* Mosheim, cent. iv. part i. c. 1. Sozomen speaks with confidence of the vision at night, but refers to Eusebius for the account of the other. Few writers have expressed any doubt respecting the latter.

ception of Christianity, that it readily admitted the truth of a merely imaginary creation. In proportion, moreover, as arguments are multiplied against the visible miracle, the equally great wonder is confirmed of a succession of providential interferences in favour of the church, till it had acquired an extent and consistency which placed it beyond the power of worldly antagonists, and left it free to contend with its internal enemies,—that ambition and sensuality, with their long train of accompanying passions, which had long since begun to plant their seeds in its bosom.

Any general change in the popular faith, so important as that from one utterly false to another intrinsically true, merits very serious attention. It is a phenomenon of which history presents us with but few examples ; and there are circumstances attending them which the candid enquirer will find it necessary to weigh with great caution, before he venture to form his opinion on their right to the important place they occupy in the annals of our race. Did we possess evidence to prove that the conversion of whole towns and provinces, which occurred in the reign of Constantine, were genuine conversions of the people to Christianity, the spectacle thus presented us would be, without exception, the grandest that was ever contemplated. But the serious and candid spirit of history forbids our delighting the imagination with so splendid but delusive an idea. The invitations of a sovereign, and the love of change, were at least equivalent with many to their belief in the idols which they worshipped. With the multitude, the chief cause of attachment to the old religion was the pomp of its spectacles, and the frequency of its festivals ; nor was this source of enthusiasm in its favour likely to be diminished so long as the monarch deemed it his duty or his interest to support the ancient institutions against the attacks of Christianity. But Constantine's conversion threw down this bulwark of paganism. The people saw it could no longer secure them either shows or holidays ; that if

they worshipped their idols, it must be without pomp or ceremony ; and that the Christians, with a triumphant and generous-minded monarch at their head, would now enjoy all the many and lofty privileges attached to an established faith. The conduct of the emperor at the beginning, and throughout his reign, confirmed them in this idea. His conversion was proclaimed at the head of a conquering army. The banner which he carried was at once the ensign of his faith and of his triumphs : his tent, with all its gorgeous and imperial ornaments, was raised in the form of a Christian temple ; and when the preachers of the faith were for the first time assembled, from all parts of the earth, at his call, they were received with the homage of potentates, and the period of their deliberation was distinguished by a proud though solemn festivity. It is not to be supposed that the people could witness this change in the state of things without feeling many of their prejudices against Christianity give way ; but it is equally evident, that the conquest of prejudices, thus effected, had very little to do with the conviction on which conversion ought to be founded ; and, therefore, if we take into view the effect which the influence and example of the emperor must have had on the minds of many, and the impression which the honours and advantages lavished on the Christians must have made on the minds of others ; and add to these the circumstance, that in that, as in all ages, there was a larger portion of mankind who, being perfectly indifferent to religion, were always ready to take the side which promised them security, we shall be disposed very much to contract our notions of the importance of the changes which took place in the reign of the first Christian emperor. The benefits, in fact, which resulted from the conversion of princes and nobles were progressive, and by no means of that sudden nature which were supposed from the outward appearances of the world. God so ordered events, that, at the period of which we are speaking, the arm of tyranny should be shortened, and that they who were willing

to become his people should no longer have any enemy to oppose them but such as were of their own hearts. This, if we may venture so to speak of the proceedings of the Almighty, seems to have marked distinctly the great divisions of the plan by which he established his church. For three hundred years it had been opposed in the world by open hostility, and the power of God and the efficacy of his grace were continually demonstrated by victories over the banded strength of both the people and their rulers ; but this was no less than a continual series of miraculous interferences ; and though at the beginning they proved in the most incontrovertible manner the divine origin of the faith, and were necessary to its establishment, they would, it may be observed, if continued, have rendered its intrinsic excellency and fitness for mankind doubtful, in the same degree in which they proved that it was supported by the Almighty. That which is intended for man by divine wisdom must only require, it is reasonable to suppose, under ordinary circumstances, that man should have proper opportunities for determining its truth and its value, and that the present and sensual motives for rejecting it be not of too overpowering a nature to prevent his giving it a calm consideration. Whenever the latter is the case, the extraordinary demonstrations of the divine presence, and the mighty energies of divine grace, must be recognised ; or human nature, blinded by its weakness, will refuse to acknowledge a truth, which can only be worshipped by sacrifice. The Almighty, in clearing away those hosts of determined enemies to the gospel, who could not have been overcome by any other power than his own, put mankind in a situation, in which, by the fair exercise of their reason, and by such a modicum of ingenuousness as it would be irrational not to cultivate, they might stand free to embrace the truth whenever they were willing to forego the vices which it forbids. When this was effected, the religion which, from the simplest of its moral precepts to the sublimest of its mysteries, was founded on the Almighty's good

will towards man, might well be left, it seems, to diffuse itself through the world without any further interference on the part of its divine Author. So far as the open exertion of his power was concerned, there is the strongest reason to believe that this was the case. While the conversion of Constantine fulfilled the purposes of his providence, in respect to the powers of the world, the strong-hold which the faith had taken on large bodies of enlightened men filled the celestial armoury with those weapons by which God had, from the beginning, intended to carry on the contest with Satan. The means by which the grand design was to be continued were of a kind which could not exist at the commencement ; but they grew up and multiplied, while the Almighty was forming and protecting the infant church by the extraordinary operations of his Spirit and his providence. Preachers of the gospel, replenished with grace and wisdom, and acting on the conviction they had received of its truth, appeared in all parts of the world : a highway had been made for them through the desert ; and, knowing that the blessing of God upon their labours would be sufficient to give them success, they pursued the work which had been begun by apostles and apostolic men, with the same hope and confidence as if they had still retained the power of working miracles, or speaking with other tongues.

A great change had, indeed, taken place when the world became subjected to a Christian ruler ; but his conversion was but as a single visible sign of the change which was thenceforth to appear in the economy of the evangelical kingdom. It marked the commencement of a new order of things, of one in which mankind found themselves the sole depositaries of the treasure which had been left them by the Redeemer, and in which they were to be proved, not, as heretofore, by peril and suffering, but by the temptations with which Satan, in all ages of the world, opposes the conversion of the soul to righteousness. The consequence of this was the perfect fulfilment of our Lord's pro-

phetic parables respecting his kingdom. It became as a wide field well sown and white for the harvest, but interspersed with many tares,—as a net cast into the sea, and gathering of every kind. We have, therefore, for the future, to behold the contest between heaven and the powers of the air carried on in a widely different manner to that in which it was commenced; and in proportion as we lose sight of the Almighty's hand, visibly disposing things according to his wisdom, the task of tracing the absolute advancement of his kingdom becomes difficult and uncertain. Constantly liable, on the one hand, to fall into the mistake of supposing that the apparent increase of the church was its real increase, and, on the other, of losing sight of the real work of the Holy Spirit, in the doubtfulness with which the mere nominal church is to be regarded, we have to exercise at the same time the caution of enquirers and the devotion of thankful worshippers. Unless this be done, ecclesiastical history must be a snare, either to our judgment or our piety: we shall look impatiently and unprofitably on the record of events which do little credit to many of the most conspicuous actors in the affairs of the church; and, not waiting to search for the manifestations of the Spirit, amid this cloud of opposing witnesses, may turn from the study with a feeling little favourable to the advancement of our religion.

At the period when the conversion of Constantine took place, the church was still suffering from the deep wounds it had received in the late persecution. The Almighty, when he permitted it to be so oppressed by its enemies, had, as it would seem, the twofold end in view, of chastising the growing errors and negligence of his people, and of preparing them for the new trials they would have to undergo in a state of peace and prosperity. But though many profited by the lesson, and anxiously laboured to awaken the spirit of primitive piety, and heal those divisions which had set one portion of their brethren against another, a love of

contention, and its usual accompaniments, pride and uncharitableness, still existed in the church to a fearful extent, and contributed greatly to deteriorate the purity as well of doctrine as of manners. Though, therefore, we are no longer to see the power of the magistrate exerted against the Christian faith, nor its professors condemned to sacrifice or bleed, the period about to be described was neither exempt from troubles, nor distinguished by any important increase in the internal strength or graces of the church.

A departure from the simplicity of revelation, a desire to set forth and embody mysteries in human language, which the Divine Spirit himself did not see it fit to define, and a combining of spiritual offices with temporal rewards and dignities, may be regarded as the prime causes of all the divisions by which the Christian world has been agitated, and the promulgation of Christianity retarded in many of its most important particulars. It was, indeed, with the establishment of our religion as it is with other benefits conferred by the Almighty. His providence had no sooner given the blessing, and men had but just begun to enjoy the advantages of religious liberty, when they formed ideas totally subversive of that peace and those elevating virtues which were to be looked for as the immediate fruit of a divine and newly established faith,—of a religion, the sublime wonders attending the publication of which were still solemnly impressed on the memory, — of one whose triumphs had been obtained by the exercise of so much human virtue, and so many striking evidences of divine interference, — of one which, sent from heaven, had not yet been long enough received among men to become greatly marred by error, or lose the beauty or the odour of its birthplace. It might have been expected that, for some generations at least after its victory over paganism, Christianity would have been allowed to shed its bland influence through the world without interruption ; that ambition and intolerance would not have ventured to oppose it till the sea

of human passion and iniquity, which had received a sudden check by its establishment, was again in the flow ; and that during that interim its moral power would have become so great, that it would only have been those who stood on the very outskirts of its empire, on whom the lust of dominion or wealth, or the insidious language of intolerance, could have exercised any influence.

But this, unfortunately for the world, was not the case ; the zeal and earnestness which it well became the early Christians to feel in the propagation of their faith were now about to be mixed with the leaven of magisterial pride. The authority which had been rightly awarded to superior sanctity, was on the eve of being transferred to those who were best qualified to make their way in courts, and who would consequently have to support their authority by new and extraordinary means. Another Canaan, in fact, beside the promised land of God, had been opened by the favour of the emperors ; and scarcely had it spread its inviting scenes before the preachers of the faith, when crowds of them rushed to claim an inheritance in its borders. The church of Christ shook to its foundations at that time, but the shock was unfelt or unheeded. A revolution, however, had taken place in the Christian commonwealth, as great as ever overturned a dynasty. New principles of action were thenceforward to govern its leaders ; the bad had sufficient motives to appear holy, and the good were tempted to take up weapons which they ought never to have wielded. To defend an opinion was to support an interest : the integrity of a system was to be preserved, because it was the foundation of profitable establishments ; and the keen, subtle reasoner, the skilful courtier, the bold rhetorician, and the confident zealot, possessed equal chances with the holiest of acquiring power and distinction in the Christian church. The humbler professors of the new faith could at first be little affected by the ambitious views of their

teachers ; but all those who held the same rank, or had a right to the same distinctions, were exposed to a severe trial by the proceedings of their worldly-minded brethren. Many of them remembered too readily the warning, that they were to be wise as serpents, and in doing so lost the harmlessness and simplicity of the dove, which typified their religion and the spirit which inspired it. Others lost their trust in the superintending care of Providence, and set about inventing projects for the defence of the truth, which had already subdued the hosts raised against it for three hundred years. Some of the most conscientious and enlightened of the Christian teachers were by degrees drawn into the ranks of these parties. Thus ambition and zeal became united in the pursuit of an object which seemed to lie midway between earth and heaven. Those who had neither piety nor faith sufficient to raise their thoughts to the ultimate purpose of religion, had the penetration to see how much worldly advantage they might gain by securing a conformity to their opinions in all matters of faith ; and those who were in reality instigated by the holiest of motives, often suffered themselves to forget the main blessings of religion in an anxious struggle to procure a conformity which, if at all attainable, was only to be effected by the ever gentle, but almighty, influences of reason and tolerant piety.

The most important of those disputes, in the inflaming of which the passions of men had so large a share, was that on the subject of the Trinity, which had its origin at Alexandria, and soon after led to a schism which shook the church to its centre. Arius, the celebrated author of this controversy, was a native of Libya, and was early distinguished among his contemporaries for extensive learning, and that love of subtle disputation which so naturally inclines the mind to venture beyond its depth, in the hope of passing to the regions of full and unclouded truth. He had formerly advocated the cause of Meletius, an Egyptian bishop, who, for some disputed cause, had been deposed by the patri-

arch*, but having been induced to leave that party, was ordained deacon by Peter, bishop of Alexandria, and afterwards priest by Achillas, Peter's successor. The latter prelate was succeeded by Alexander, in whose time Arius was one of the most distinguished presbyters in the diocese. Alexander himself was a well known favourer of the Sabellians, to whom Arius was as strongly opposed; and the bishop happening one day, while conversing with several of his clergy, to make some observation which savoured of his favourite opinions, Arius immediately commenced an argument on the subject, and pursued it with all that force and subtlety for which he was remarkable. Having asserted, as the foundation of his reasonings, that the nature of the Deity, and the relation of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father, might be made the subject of a syllogism, he succeeded in convincing some, and unsettling the faith of many. His opinions, for which the soil was already prepared by former heresies, were rapidly diffused over the whole of Egypt, Libya, and the adjacent countries, and at length obtained a powerful advocate in Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia. Alexander, perceiving the rapid spread of the doctrines which had been first preached by his presbyter in opposition to his own, was ill disposed to repress his indignation; and the conduct of Eusebius at once incited him to commence proceedings against the schismatics. His first measure was to expel and anathematise Arius and his followers; his next, to address a circular epistle to all the prelates of his diocese. In this letter he inveighs with bitterness against the iniquitous strivers with Christ, who taught an apostasy which might rightly be regarded as the precursor of antichrist; and holds up for general detestation the conduct of Eusebius, who had received the heretics, and

* The most common account is, that Meletius was guilty of sacrificing during the late persecution. Athanasius is said to have been the author of this report. Others, on the contrary, contend that Peter quarrelled with him because he was more strict than himself; and these are met with the assertion that he was too loose in his conduct and doctrine.

thus, he says, confounded impiety with piety, and truth with falsehood.

The effect of this appeal was such as might have been expected. While the friends of Alexander agreed with him in the somewhat over-strenuous expressions of hostility towards Arius and Eusebius, the schismatics themselves were greatly irritated by the conduct of the bishop, and, instead of showing any readiness to submit their dogmas to his authority and scrutiny, entered with acrimony as well as zeal on the farther diffusion of their principles. Nicomedia was at this time the residence of the emperor, and Eusebius thence derived considerable increase to his influence. Many prelates professed their accession to the party of which he was the head ; and finding himself thus supported, he wrote first to Alexander, requesting him to cease from the violent measures he had taken against Arius, and then to the other bishops, admonishing them not to yield their opinions to the judgment of the Alexandrian primate.

The contest at length rose to such a height, that the people became as intent on the dispute as the clergy ; and the two parties exercised so little forbearance towards each other, that their disputes attracted the observation of the pagans, who, glad to seize upon any pretence for attacking Christianity, transferred the satire which should have been confined to its professors to the religion itself ; and the public theatres resounded with profane scoffs at a system which condemns in the distinctest manner the conduct which merited their scorn. To increase the evil, most of the other parties, opposed to the orthodox, united in the support of Arius, and the church in the East every where presented a scene of trouble and confusion.

Constantine could not long remain ignorant of this unfavourable state of affairs, on hearing of which he is said to have expressed the most lively sorrow. Trusting, however, that it was still possible to heal the schism

by advice and exhortation, he wrote to both Alexander and Arius, soliciting them, in the most affectionate and persuasive terms, to discontinue a controversy which could only be carried on with so much danger to the peace and unity of the church. In order to give greater force to his letters, he sent them by Hosius, the venerable bishop of Corduba, in Spain, who was also to employ all the influence he possessed to the same purpose.

But neither the authority of the emperor, nor the fatherly exhortations of the pious prelate, could induce the polemics to cease from mutual recriminations. The state of the community, consequently, became every day worse ; and Constantine resolved upon referring the decision of the controversy to the church at large. For this purpose, he sent letters to the bishops of the several dioceses, and other persons eminent for their learning, piety, or experience, inviting them to assemble at Nice in Bithynia, in order that they might consult together on the two great subjects of controversy which were then agitating Christendom ; that is, the proper time for keeping the festival of Easter, and the divinity of our Lord. The summons of the emperor was readily obeyed. The provinces of Europe, Asia, and Africa sent their numerous pastors to the place of assembly ; and the remote districts of Palestine, Arabia, Thebes, Libya, and even Scythia, were not without representatives of learning and celebrity. A meeting of such solemnity and grandeur had not yet taken place in the church ; and Eusebius does not hesitate to compare it with the gathering together of the men out of every nation on the day of Pentecost, nor to observe that this was the more solemn of the two.*

Constantine had omitted nothing to render the synod complete: the ecclesiastics invited to attend it were provided with whatever could facilitate their journey ; and on their arrival at Nice were daily entertained in a manner becoming the piety and liberality of their imperial host. Some difference of opinion prevails re

* Eusebius, *De Vita Constant.* lib. iii. c. 8.

specting the number of prelates present on the occasion ; but it is probable that there were not less than three hundred, while the number of presbyters was at least five hundred. A similar degree of doubt exists with regard to the edifice in which the debates took place. According to an expression in Eusebius, it would appear that the imperial palace was the scene of the contest between the rival parties : but it has been rightly observed, that it would detract much from the authority of the council to believe that it held its sittings in the residence of the emperor ; and the most probable supposition is, that it carried on its various preliminary consultations in the principal church of the place, and that it was not till they were on the point of concluding the debate that they assembled in the palace, and propounded their opinions for the approbation of the emperor.* However this may be, on the day appointed for the solemn assembling of the council in the imperial presence, the central hall of the palace was opened to the throngs of ecclesiastics, who had come from all parts of the world to deliver their opinions on the important questions in dispute. They took their places in regular order, upon benches arranged on each side of the spacious apartment, and remained seated in silence, expecting the appearance of the emperor. At length his approach was announced ; and the monarch of the world was seen entering the assembly, accompanied not with the military pomp of guards and heralds, but by a band of holy men, whose only distinction was their virtue and profound love of their Saviour. At his entrance the whole company arose ; nor was the deep humility expressed in his countenance and demeanour rendered the less striking by the natural dignity of his person, or his rich and embroidered purple robes, and splendid jewels, which, according to his biographer, dazzled the eyes of the beholders with their brightness, and made him seem like an angel of God. When he had reached the upper part of the hall, he paused ; a low golden chair was

* Eusebius, c. 10.

then placed before him ; but he refused to take his seat till he had received the salutations of the holy fathers.*

Silence being restored, the bishop who presided on the right side of the hall arose, and in a short speech expressed the gratitude of the council to God for having put it in the mind of the prince, to take such care of his church. Constantine listened to the prelate with a cheerful and benign aspect ; and after seeming to collect his thoughts, addressed the assembly in a mild tone of voice, and in the Latin language, to the following effect : —

“ In beholding you thus assembled, my beloved, I enjoy the accomplishment of my most earnest supplications ; and amid all the benefits for which I have to thank the Sovereign of the universe, praise him for this, as the greatest which in his bounty he has bestowed. May no enemy, therefore, ever again have it in his power to disturb our peace and felicity, when, by the aid of the Saviour, we are once freed from the tyranny of those who have declared war against God ; nor may any lover of evil, by his calumnies or inventions, corrupt the divine law : for to me no war, or battle, or other troubles, could seem so dire or dangerous as intestine division in the church of God. When, indeed, my arms, by the favour and help of the Almighty, were rendered victorious, I thought that nothing was then wanting to me but to praise him for his blessings, and rejoice with those whom he had enabled me to deliver. On receiving, therefore, the unlooked-for intelligence of your dissensions, I immediately judged it necessary to take the matter into consideration, and, hoping that I might thereby afford some remedy to the evil, have hastened to call you together. And greatly do I rejoice at beholding you thus assembled, and well will my prayers be fulfilled, when I see you of one mind, agreed in sentiment and affection, and exhibiting the concord which, as the ministers of God, you are bound to preach to others. Hasten, then, beloved, as good servants and ministers

* Eusebius, c. xii.

of our common Lord and Saviour, to remove from among you the causes of the present dissensions, so that, by the laws of peace, you may break asunder the bond of contention ; by doing which, you will render an acceptable homage to the Almighty, and bestow a most excellent favour on me your fellow-servant."

The members of the synod then began to expound their several opinions, and the emperor with great suavity continued patiently to exert himself in endeavouring to inspire the opponents with more charity and forbearance than they ever appeared inclined to exercise. Among the persons present were several professed dialecticians and philosophers ; nor did they show any inclination to neglect so favourable an opportunity for the display of their powers. Some confusion hence arose ; and the more simple-minded of the audience were scandalised at the proud and self-sufficient behaviour of the sophists, who sought to confound the plain truth of the gospel with their fantastic inventions. Inspired by this feeling, a venerable old man, who had been a confessor, got up, and said to the philosophers, " Christ and his apostles did not teach us the art of logic, nor an empty cunningness, but a naked wisdom, to be kept by faith and good works." The suddenness of this appeal, its obvious propriety, and the well known piety of the speaker, produced a considerable effect ; and the logicians had the good sense to cease from further attempts to obtrude their niceties on the attention of the meeting.*

Constantine, however, found no little difficulty in bringing the various influential persons that composed the synod into that frame of mind which it was so necessary they should possess, in order to decide on the principles of their common faith. Among those who distinguished themselves in the foremost ranks against the Arians was Athanasius, then only a deacon in the church of Alexandria, but on whose eloquence and

* Sozomen, Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. 18. According to the relations of this historian, two of these philosophers were converted by the simple appeal made to their reason and consciences.

acuteness the bishop placed his chief dependence. To him and his party were opposed Arius himself, Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognis of Nicæa, Maris of Chalcedon, Theonas of Marmorica, and Secundus of Ptolemais ; with about twenty other persons of inferior celebrity. After considerable discussion, the overwhelming majority of the orthodox came to the conclusion, that the divinity of the Redeemer might be distinctly set forth, by declaring the unity, or rather sameness, of his essence with that of the Father ; an object which they attained by inventing the term *homoousios*. Three hundred and eighteen members of the synod are said to have consented, with one voice, to the adoption of this mode of expressing their belief in the divinity of our Lord. But it would seem, from what is recorded of Eusebius of Cæsarea, the historian, and from the efforts which were necessary, during the whole sitting of the council, to soften the altercations of the members, that they regarded the propriety of the expression with many different degrees of approbation, and that some consented to its adoption only from the principle, that conformity was their duty to the church at large.

The creed, still known by the name of the city where it was composed, was then drawn up and subscribed ; and, through the influence of Constantia, the emperor's sister, all the episcopal supporters of Arius, with the exception of Secundus of Ptolemais, and Theonas of Marmorica, were induced to comply ; but, to secure their conformity, they were allowed to substitute the word *homoiousios* for *homoousios*, or *similarity* for *sameness* of essence.

The orthodox, however, were far from being contented with having thus established the faith of the church. It might have been reasonably supposed that the triumph they had gained, by the power of reason and the testimony of Scripture, would have completed their most sanguine wishes, and that they would have returned, in the spirit of Christian meekness, to their respective flocks, to pray for the conversion of the

Arians, and defend, by the means which had already proved successful, the true doctrines of their faith. But it was not in this manner they employed the advantage they had gained. According to their counsel, Arius and his followers were expelled the synod. The former was prohibited from returning to Alexandria, and sent into exile: his books were condemned as blasphemous, and publicly burnt; and still further, it was ordained by the emperor that the crime of concealing them should be punished with death.*

Some other matters of importance were settled during the session of this celebrated council. The festival of Easter was fixed for Sundays; Meletius, the schismatical bishop, was deprived of authority, but allowed to retain his title; and several regulations were entered into respecting the discipline of the clergy and the general affairs of the church. These determinations were embraced in twenty canons; and some of them serve to afford us an important insight into the state of discipline and opinion at the period. Thus we find a penance of ten years prescribed for those who should have voluntarily renounced their faith, and one of thirteen years for such as should have apostatised to procure any office. The door of the priesthood was also to be for ever shut against those who should have done violence to their persons like Origen: the bishop was endowed with the power of granting or refusing, at his discretion, the sacrament to dying persons; and if any one, supposed to be at the point of death, should have received the viaticum, but afterwards recovered, he was not to possess any superiority of rank through the circumstance of having enjoyed absolution. In respect to the clergy, it was decreed, that no bishop, priest, or deacon, should be suffered to keep women in his house, unless they were near relations: such as had sacrificed were to be degraded, but the Novatians were allowed to retain their rank, if they consented to make profession of following the discipline of the church, and

* Sozomen, Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. 21.

again received imposition of hands. The rights and jurisdictions of the various bishops, especially those of Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Rome, were also defined, but without assigning any superiority to the latter. The object of the concluding canon was somewhat singular: it ordained, that the custom which prevailed in some churches, of kneeling on Sunday and Whitsunday, should be no longer continued, and that the congregations in all churches should pray standing.*

Such is the substance of the acts and constitutions of this first, and most celebrated, of the general councils. Its decision respecting the Arian and Meletian controversy was made known to the church in Egypt by a solemn epistle, dictated in the name of the synod, as was also the resolution which concerned the keeping of Easter, by a letter from Constantine, addressed to the faithful in general. The grand question to which Arius and his coadjutors had given rise was thus determined, as far as authority could determine a matter in which both the intellects and passions of a numerous body of theologians and philosophers had been long and anxiously employed. Religion itself was placed in danger by the virulence which the controversy had generated; and we find the substance of volumes in the record of the simple fact, that the emperor, on opening the assembly, had to reprove the bishops for the letters they had sent him, containing accusations against those who differed from them in sentiment, but which letters, he said, he had burnt without reading, and then exhorted them to peace and unanimity. The triumph of the orthodox, though a theme for great congratulation to the Christian world, was purchased at no slight cost; for it was attended with the introduction of penal punishments for religious errors. And in what part of Scripture could it be found that the civil magistrate bore his sword for such a purpose? By what principle of Christianity could it be shown, that those who could

* Du Pin, *Biblioth. Pat.* Basnage, *Hist. de l'Eglise*, liv. x. c. 2. The latter writer observes, that, allowing the authority claimed for general councils, the decisions now established ought to have been final.

not convince the gainsayer might scourge him? That if they could not bring the erring sheep into the fold, they might slay it on the highway? But no misgivings troubled the minds of the successful polemics. The emperor treated them with the most profound deference; and, before their departure, invited them to a splendid banquet, which, according to the account of the historians, was as agreeable to them as it was new, and in which they imagined that they saw a representation of the reign of Jesus Christ, and rather a vision than a reality!*

We turn with satisfaction from the view of these disputes, so little advantageous to the cause of Christianity, to the far more agreeable consideration of the increase which, notwithstanding every species of opposition, was daily taking place in the number of the faithful. Constantine, with a zeal which grew warmer and warmer, as he became better acquainted with the intrinsic worth of the Gospel, left no means untried for the conversion of the provinces of his empire in which paganism was still professed. Some of the methods, however, which he employed in this laudable endeavour, savoured too strongly of force to merit unlimited approbation; nor did he, till towards the termination of his career, form any distinct idea of the supreme authority of the religion he had embraced. Where, without danger to the careful system of policy he pursued, he could compel his subjects to receive the teachers of Christianity, he appears to have done so with some degree of harshness; but when, on the contrary, such a procedure seemed attended with danger, he culpably yielded more than could be done consistently with upright or decided views. One of the most doubtful of his measures, perhaps, was that by which he made the populace the executioners of his will in the destruction of the images which were still to be found in the pagan cities. The historian Sozomen speaks in an approving tone of his not ordering the military to perform this work,

* Eusebius, *De Vita Constant.* lib. iii. c. 15.

but leaving it to the people. There can be little doubt, however, but that much strife must have been created between the pagans and Christians by a proceeding of this nature. The zeal which prompts to any work of violence is seldom found in combination with earnest charity; and it was that quality which in their present altered circumstances it was most necessary for the faithful to cultivate. As symbols of all the falsehoods of the old religion, Constantine performed a solemn duty to his subjects in removing the statues; but it was far from necessary to render the doing of this an occasion for allowing one part of the community to act as if they were celebrating a triumph over the other. The representatives of the supreme power in the empire might have done it with a dignity becoming the design, an excited people certainly could not. But the conduct of Constantine in this affair appears still more inconsistent with due reflection, when we find that he allowed all such statues as were formed of brass, or were of excellent workmanship, to be saved and carried to Constantinople, as ornaments of that newly-established capital. Among these were the statue of Apollo, which had been worshipped in the temple at Delphos, and the statues of the Muses from Helicon; treasures of art which the cultivated mind might well regret to lose, but which, in the age of Constantine, and when he had declared in the most conspicuous manner the danger of such objects, it would evidently have been expedient to seclude from the public gaze. They were splendid creations of genius, wrought upon by the essential spirit of mythology; they merited admiration of the highest kind, and it required the purest graces and the most genuine wisdom of Christianity to prevent him who felt this admiration from allowing it to pass into a sentiment similar to that inspired by true religion, when only the heart is occupied with it, and when it is the result of impulse more than of conviction. That much injury was done to the cause which Constantine desired to promote, by this reservation of the most eloquent symbols of idolatry,

can hardly be doubted. There must have been numbers who, having embraced Christianity from motives of policy, or from the example of others, were far from being superior to all the associations which would rise in their minds at the sight of the idols they had formerly worshipped. The contempt with which, notwithstanding their beauty, they were generally treated, would inspire a feeling of resentful melancholy, even when reason was altogether on the other side; and the sensuality and imagination of the young, and the fondness for what is out of fashion of the old, would alike take fire when appealed to by these relics of the past. That this is not a mere supposition, we have sufficient proof in the history of the succeeding age. Julian found a powerful party in the empire ready to support him, not simply on the calculations of policy, but with the strongest enthusiasm. Superstition returned to the charge with a readiness which shows that it had been nourished with its proper nourishment; and the idols which had been placed by Constantine in the high places of the city as its ornaments could scarcely be elevated higher when they were again recognised as its divinities.* But these were errors which fairly admit of excuse, when it is considered that Constantine was surrounded by difficulties, and that we ought scarcely to look for the perfection of Christian wisdom in a man who, though acknowledging the divine origin of the faith, would not be baptized till on the point of death, from the fear that he might not then break its commandments with safety. Much greater reason have we to be surprised that with these principles he did so much good, and not more harm. Churches were built by his order in every province of the empire. His mother Helena having, after a diligent search, found, as it was supposed, the cross on which our Lord was crucified, erected a noble church at Jerusalem, on the spot where he had been buried. Many heathen nations, also, who had hitherto resisted the preaching of the gospel, yielded to the power

* Sozomen, lib. i. c. 5. Socrates, lib. i. c. 16.

or the persuasions of the emperor, and saw their towns and villages provided with decent places of Christian worship. The Goths, the Sarmatians, and Iberians, on the one side, and the people of the farthest East on the other, crowned the efforts of Constantine and his ministers by their conversion, and the world began every where to present externally an appearance of adhesion to the Christian faith. The death of Constantine occurred in the year 337; and, as has been already mentioned, it was not till he found his last moments approaching that he received baptism. It was then administered to him by his favourite bishop, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and he left the world, deservedly lamented by his subjects, as a just and enlightened monarch. He had been an instrument in the hand of Providence to produce one of the greatest changes that had ever taken place in the affairs of mankind. Christianity had made vast conquests since its commencement; but it would be a mistake to suppose that the soil was every where prepared to receive its truths. Nothing could be more erroneous than the idea, that the circumstances under which the rapid change from paganism to the new faith took place at this period were similar to those which preceded the Reformation. In the latter instance, it was a question of degree;—was more or less truth to be sought for, or received? In the former, it was between two creeds, of which one must be altogether false, and the other altogether true. A gradual improvement of the public mind might so prepare a nation for putting aside the corruptions of truth, that their receiving the truth itself might almost be considered as the natural consequence of that improvement. But whatever advances may have taken place in the state of a people, the gulf between the false and the true remains equally great, and, whenever it is passed, must be passed by an extraordinary effort. They may long stand doubtful on one side of it; but the distance between its shores will not diminish, nor can any contrivance, or any change of disposition, bring

them together. Paganism and Christianity presented no points of contact: the pagan philosopher might possess notions which belonged to the great circle of moral truth, but these notions pertained to his philosophy, not to his religion; and they, that is the mass of the people, who were not instructed in his systems, had not the advantage of the smallest piece of debateable ground on which they might pause for awhile, and then pass easily into the dominion of truth.

The above narrative is amply sufficient to show that intolerance, and a disposition to court imperial patronage, would at no distant period produce a considerable effect on the ecclesiastical character. The great and admirable men, who had supported the faith of thousands, when tried in the furnace of persecution, were remarkable for their meekness, their indifference to worldly acquisitions and luxuries, and the confidence which they placed in the simple delivery of the truth, with the attendance of the promised blessing, as the sufficient means for converting men from error. Their successors of the fourth century, with some few illustrious exceptions, were of a totally different character. To them it appeared impossible to support the cause of truth without the aid of laws and decrees. The ecclesiastical office seemed to require other ornaments than those of a quiet spirit and a diligent and well-instructed mind; and two parties being speedily formed, each containing many men of ability, and a still greater number of those who eagerly panted for honours and emoluments, in which, though there might be as much knowledge as zeal evinced, there would be less of Christianity than either.

The harsh treatment which Arius had received at the council was far from detaching either him or his followers from the system which they held. Many, even of those who had signed the confession of faith, cherished in secret the opinions of the banished heretic; and confusion reigned, without any thing to oppose its destructive influence but the faith and settled piety of

humbler and more obscure believers. At length, through the interest of Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, who was a friend of Arius, and enjoyed the unlimited confidence of the emperor, the exiles were recalled from banishment, and an order was sent to Athanasius, who had been raised to the bishopric of Alexandria, to restore Arius to the situation he formerly held in that diocese.* The same want of discretion was here shown as in the punishment of Arius. It was one thing to reverse the sentence which had been unjustly passed, and another to compel the bishop to reinstate an ecclesiastic who was believed to teach erroneous doctrine. In neither case had the civil power any right to interfere ; and the heads of the church were only punished, perhaps, as they merited, for their calling in the aid of the magistrate when they saw Athanasius threatened with immediate deposition unless he chose to comply with the order of the government in respect to Arius. As the followers of the latter increased in confidence they exercised all their art, and all the interest they possessed with the emperor, to expel the bishops who had opposed them in the council from their dioceses. In several instances they were successful ; but the sudden death of Arius while at Constantinople, demanding his re-admission into the church, gave a temporary check to their proceedings.

Athanasius was by far the most conspicuous character in the orthodox party, and we shall, therefore, pursue his story to the close of his labours. He had the strongest reason to expect, that whenever the Arians might obtain the ascendancy, he would be among the first to feel their vengeance. Scarcely, indeed, had they regained the confidence of the emperor, when they persuaded him that Athanasius, instead of being the excellent and holy man he was said to be, by all but themselves, had disgraced his office by the commission of the darkest crimes. Constantine was at last induced, by these representations, to allow of his being summoned to a synod at Tyre, where he ordered that

* Socrates, *Hist. Eccles.* lib. i. c. 3, &c. Fleury, liv. xi. c. 40—51.

a strict examination should be made into all the accusations promulgated against him. There were persons present at this assembly who lamented deeply the evils which appeared to be coming on the church from these divisions among those who ought to have been looked to as its chief supporters. Potamo, the bishop of Heraclea, could not repress his indignation when he saw Eusebius, bishop of Cæsarea, take his seat as the president of the synod, and judge of Athanasius. — “What!” said the virtuous old man, “can you, Eusebius, sit on the bench, while the innocent Athanasius comes to the bar to be judged? Who can endure to witness such proceedings? Were not you in prison with us during the persecution? I lost an eye in defence of the truth; you have no wound to show, but are both alive and whole! How escaped you from prison, unless you promised to sacrifice, or really did so?” This reproof, whether true or false, had the effect of throwing the assembly into confusion, and the examination was deferred to a future meeting of the synod.

It is difficult to conceive whence the virulence of party animosity could have gathered so much strength in that early period; but the enemies of Athanasius did not hesitate to attempt his ruin by falsehoods so gross and palpable, that the wickedness of their proceedings was almost equalled by their folly. Among other crimes laid to his charge was that of the murder of Arsenius, a bishop of the Meletians, one of the sectarian bodies which Athanasius had thought it his duty to oppose with the whole strength of his authority and talents. At the very time, however, that this accusation was preferred against him, it was known to many of his enemies that Arsenius was alive and uninjured. But this had no other effect than to induce them to proceed with the greater caution in their undertaking, and, desiring Arsenius to conceal himself for a time, they boldly persevered in their original intentions.* Athana-

* Arsenius is described as originally a reader in the church of Alexandria, and as having committed some offence, to escape the punishment of which

sius, though necessarily conscious of his innocence, was anxious to prove it beyond the power of doubt, and employed the utmost diligence to ascertain, if possible, the fate or the retreat of the Meletian bishop. His exertions were successful, and he had the satisfaction to discover that the supposed victim of his hostility was concealed in Tyre itself. The day of trial at length arrived, and exultation was apparent in the countenances of his enemies, who imagined themselves furnished with proofs of his guilt which he would be wholly unable to invalidate. To confirm the testimony of the witnesses, a hand was produced in court which was said to have been cut from the murdered body of Arsenius, and to have been preserved by Athanasius for the performance of certain impious and magical experiments. The sight of the shrivelled limb thrilled the spectators with horror. The murder was now considered to be proved beyond a doubt; and those who were most interested in the condemnation of the accused made the hall echo with their exclamations of joy at this confirmation of his guilt. Unmoved at the strange and unholy scene of which he was the principal object, Athanasius waited patiently till this rude ebullition of animosity was quieted, and then calmly enquired if any of the persons present were acquainted with Arsenius? Paul, the bishop of Tyre, and many others in the court, answered in the affirmative, and the Meletian bishop was immediately led into court. Confusion and amazement instantly silenced the voices of the assembly, and Athanasius, turning back the cloak of Arsenius, pointed first to one hand and then to another, observing, at the same time, to the spectators, "You see that Arsenius has

he was obliged to flee. Athanasius, it is further said, had a claim on his gratitude, having assisted him in his flight. It is uncertain, therefore, whether Arsenius was concealed by the Arians for the express purpose of accusing Athanasius, or whether they took advantage of his sudden disappearance. Whichever was the case, he himself communicated the place of his retreat to the injured prelate, and came forth, as described, at the time appointed. *Vita S. Athan. ex Metaphrasti Opera*, edit. Benedict. tom. i. part i. p. 143.; also *Vita nunc p. adorn.* in same edit. p. 20.

both his hands; how my accusers came by the third hand, I leave it to them to explain."

Constantine, convinced of the innocence of Athanasius, in respect to the above offence, is said to have written to him, condemning the indecent proceedings of his enemies, assuring him of protection, and urging him at the same time to exercise patience and moderation. But his enemies were not to be discouraged by a single defeat. Accusation after accusation was preferred against him, and an assembly of bishops at length proceeded to depose him. Convinced that he had no chance of obtaining justice from men predetermined on his ruin, he hastened to Constantinople with the intention of making his case known to the emperor. But Constantine, little inclined to involve himself any further in ecclesiastical disputes, received him with coldness, and refused to hear his complaints. This meeting took place at the gate of the city, which the emperor was entering on horseback as Athanasius arrived. The latter, excited by the strangeness of his situation, and deeply moved by the repulse he had so unjustly received, gave way to the natural impetuosity of his nature, and exclaimed, "The Lord judge between you and me, and summon you to account for the union you have formed with my accusers." He then added, that he asked no favour, but rigorous justice, and that his only desire was to be allowed to plead his cause in the imperial presence. As this request could not be rejected without manifest injustice, Constantine signified his assent to the proposal, and orders were forthwith issued for the assembling of a synod at Constantinople.*

Athanasius gained little advantage by this demand for another trial. His enemies were too numerous, and their resources too abundant, to be defied even in the presence of his sovereign, and armed though he was with the strongest proofs of innocence. Not willing, it appears, to trust the success of their enterprise on an accusation of theological error, to which the emperor would, pro-

* Tillemont, *Mém. Ecclés.* Cave, *art. Athanasius.* See also Fleury.

bably, pay little attention, they now alleged that Athanasius had been guilty of a political offence, which they knew the monarch was accustomed to punish with strict and prompt severity. Constantinople depended in a considerable degree on Egypt for many of the most necessary articles of daily consumption, and the most effectual means, consequently, which those who were unfriendly to the emperor could employ to injure the prosperity of his new capital, was to retard, either by mercantile manœuvres or similar means, the usual supply of provisions from the Egyptian markets. One distinguished man, the philosopher Sopater, had already suffered death on being convicted of this offence; and it was for the same crime that the bishop of Alexandria was now said to be worthy of condign punishment. It was in vain that he argued on the absurdity of this accusation; that he represented himself poor, and without authority; and asked how it was possible for a man in his situation to have effected such a project? Eusebius of Nicomedia answered him by swearing that he was both rich and powerful, and that he had hardihood sufficient to attempt any thing. The confidence with which the accusers of Athanasius thus persisted in their allegations, combined with the indignation which Constantine felt at the bare mention of his supposed crime, left the persecuted bishop no chance of escape, and it was generally expected that he would be condemned to share the fate of Sopater. But the emperor still retained some respect for the character of the man whom he had formerly been taught to regard as one of the greatest ornaments of the Christian church, and instead of ordering him to be beheaded, banished him to Trèves, in Gaul.

Whether Athanasius was or was not guilty of the offence for which he was thus punished, Constantine himself can scarcely be accused of injustice. He regarded the witnesses on whose evidence he acted as worthy of implicit credit, and had he condemned the bishop on the simple charge of his professing heterodox opinions, neither Athanasius, unfortunately, nor his

party, could have uttered any reasonable complaint. They had themselves taught Constantine the monstrous principle, that difference of opinion might constitute an offence punishable by the state, and with penalties like a crime against the laws ! The lamentable want of all charity, which appears to have disgraced the most powerful ecclesiastics of this period, infected their writings as well as their proceedings ; and it is, consequently, difficult for the candid enquirer to form satisfactory conclusions on the subject of the Athanasian or Arian persecutions. Most of the stories related by the historians of the time are strongly tinged by the prejudices of their respective writers, and are, therefore, to be received with the greatest caution. But it is sufficiently clear, that a foundation was now laid on which the persecutors of subsequent ages might establish their principles to the satisfaction both of themselves and the governments under which they acted. Divisions existed in the church many years before the commencement of the great schism to which we have referred ; but it was not till then that the ministers of religion began to appeal to the magistrate, or considered that any other penalty was due to dissent but that which Scripture and reason seem alike to justify ; the denial, namely, of the particular religious advantages which belong to a distinct religious body, to such persons as may impugn the principles on which the society is established, or considers itself established, to promulge.

Few of those who have suffered from persecution in any period of the world have stood exposed to greater peril than Athanasius. He had not been long at Trèves when, by the death of Constantine, the empire passed into the hands of his three sons, Constantine, Constantius, and Constans. By the first of these young monarchs the bishop of Alexandria was treated with the most profound respect, and restored to his rank and diocese. The affection with which he was received on his return to Alexandria by all classes, both of the clergy and the people, affords the strongest proof that could be produced

of the injustice of his enemies.* But the death of his protector, Constantine, again exposed him to their machinations. A synod was assembled in order to determine, whether a bishop, who had been once deposed, could be restored, unless by the decree of an assembly similar to that by which he had been condemned. The question, as was foreseen, was determined in the negative, and Athanasius found it necessary to make his escape to Rome.† There he remained for three years, at the end of which period, and after having been acquitted in a council summoned by the reigning pope to enquire into his case, he was called to Milan, the residence of Constans, to whom Italy had fallen in the partition of the empire. Both that monarch and his ministers were strongly attached to the Athanasian doctrines, and the manners and personal accomplishments of their great defender were well calculated to obtain him a respectful reception in the court of his new patron. His cause was soon regarded as that of religion itself; and the advisers of Constans urgently insisted on the necessity of calling a synod, and securing his restoration. The bishops, as well of the eastern as of the western churches, were accordingly summoned to meet at Sardica, but the august assembly could come to no decision on the subject; and the members which composed it separated in disgust: those of the West resolved on supporting the innocence of Athanasius, and those of the East equally obstinate in their assertion of his guilt. Irritated by this opposition to his wishes, Constans took the hazardous step of writing to his brother Constantius, declaring that if Athanasius was not speedily re-instated in his diocese, he would instantly arm his troops in his cause, and re-seat him on the episcopal throne by force. As the emperor of the East had no inclination to involve himself in a hazardous encounter

* Tillemont, *Mém. Ecclés.* art. Athanase.

† *Vita S. Athan.* Opera, p. 35. There is a long controversy on the subject of this journey to Rome, of the period when it took place, and the circumstances attending it; but it is of little importance to the general reader. See Baronius, and the notes of Pagi.

with his brother, he expressed his utmost willingness to receive Athanasius with all regard and attention ; and, as if fearful lest any delay in his restoration might be productive of dangerous consequences, sent letter after letter desiring his return with all the speed that was practicable.

Athanasius did not long enjoy his restored dignity. Constans, soon after his return, fell a victim to the usurper Magnentius ; and Constantius, freed from the threats of his brother, immediately flung away the mask under which he had been obliged to conceal his real dispositions. The bishop of Alexandria, from the circumstances attending his restoration, had become, in his eyes, a bitter personal enemy, and he resolved to avenge himself to the full extent of his power. Eager, however, as he was to inflict summary punishment on the obnoxious prelate, he found it impossible to effect his purpose with safety till, after two years of constant plotting, he had obtained the sentence of two synods, held at Arles and Milan, in his favour. To show the condition to which the church had reduced itself by claiming the interference of the civil power, we need but mention that those prelates who would not subscribe to the decision of the councils were informed that, unless they agreed to the condemnation of Athanasius, according to the decree of the synods, they would themselves be deposed and banished by a similar ordinance. Still greater violence was exercised against some of the other clergy : the prison and the scourge were become the common resource of the emperor and his Arian subjects against those of the opposite creed. Men of the most irreproachable character were driven from their churches to make room for others who had neither learning nor experience to qualify them for their office ; and the evil spirits of schism and persecution shared the domain of the church between them.

Athanasius was speedily informed of the measures taken against him at Arles and Milan, and of the distressed condition of his followers and fellow-labourers ;

but his courage was equal to his piety; and he continued with unabated energy to instruct his people, and urge them to await with fortitude the storm which he foresaw was ready to burst upon their heads. In a letter which he wrote to a bishop who had lately retired into the deserts, he expresses all those sentiments of high and resolute devotion which so remarkably distinguished him in every period of his career: — “O my dear Dracontius*,” says he, “your retreat has deeply afflicted us. Before your ordination you lived for yourself, but now you belong to your flock and to the church. If you tremble at the fearful aspect of the times in which we live, where is your courage? It is in such circumstances as these that it especially behoves us to show our zeal and boldness for the cause of Jesus Christ. Truth must be victorious in the end; error can only triumph for a time! If those who went before us had been timid and wavering, would you now have been a Christian? Feeble as you say you are, you yet should be the guardian of your flock, lest the enemies of the truth, finding them abandoned, should take occasion to spoil and ravage them. Leave us not alone in the combat!”†

The expected tempest at length came with all its fury. Athanasius had repelled more than one imperial order to retire from his see; and the people of Alexandria expressed their determination to defend him against whatever attempts might be made to expel him. Threats having thus proved abortive, the ministers of the emperor had recourse to violence, and one night, when the bishop and a numerous congregation were assembled at their devotions in the cathedral, a body of 5000 soldiers, under the command of Syrianus, duke of Egypt, were landed in the city, and immediately led to invest the church. The tumult occasioned by this proceeding spread instant alarm through the startled congregation, and all rose to prepare for a precipitate flight. But

* Such was the respect entertained for this Dracontius, that many Gentiles promised to embrace Christianity from admiration of his character. Vita S. Athan. Opera, p. 58.

† Fleury, Hist. Ecclès.

Athanasius, by his calm and resigned bearing, repressed the panic which had seized the assembly, and in obedience to his exhortations it immediately commenced and chanted the 135th psalm. While it was performing this act of devotion, the soldiers were assailing the doors of the church with incessant blows, and in a few minutes the whole armed multitude burst furiously into the aisles of the sacred edifice. A hundred voices were raised to implore Athanasius to fly; but he remained immovable in his episcopal chair, watching the escape of his flock, nor did he leave his station till the last were about to depart, when he was dragged away by some of the most courageous and devoted of his clergy. The confusion which prevailed prevented his being discovered, and he was speedily lost in the dense crowd which surrounded the church. But as he was driven to and fro by the terrified multitude, against whom the soldiers were exercising the most brutal violence, he lost his footing, and lay for some moments in imminent peril of being trampled to death. Having, however, with great difficulty, raised himself from the ground, he contrived to make his way to a place of concealment, and from thence to the deserts of Thebais, where he was sure of finding a safe asylum and numerous friends among the devout hermits who inhabited that solitary region. But his steps were traced by the indefatigable ministers of Arian rage; bands of soldiers were despatched to seize him in his retreat, and offers of the richest kind held out to those who should have the good fortune to bring him to the emperor either alive or dead. His safety now wholly depended, humanly speaking, on the courage and fidelity of the monks and hermits in whose cells he had found a shelter. Nor was his confidence in their assistance abused. Protecting him sometimes by force, at others by cautious contrivances, and not unfrequently by even sacrificing their lives in resisting his pursuers, they enabled him to defy all the arts which were employed to effect his ruin. But the peril to which his protectors were thus exposed determined Athanasius

to go farther into the deserts; and it was not till he had reached the wildest and most remote district of those inhospitable plains that he paused in his wanderings.* While in the desert, he composed some of his most important treatises; and though conforming himself, in the strictest manner, to the mode of life followed by the monks, he never forgot the labours or duties of a bishop. He thus became an object of the highest veneration to the ascetics. Saint Anthony had bequeathed him his garment; and it being now presented him, he clothed himself in it, and continued to wear it to the end of his life. This conduct, in a man whose station had placed him in the midst of a proud and busy world, could not fail to be regarded as worthy of profound admiration; and Athanasius, by the persecutions which he suffered, saw his reputation extended over a region from which fame might have retreated in despair.

There is, however, reason to believe that Athanasius had sometimes the courage to leave his solitude, and that he ventured to present himself more than once to his faithful disciples at Alexandria. In these visits, it is reported, he was often on the point of being discovered by his enemies; on one of which occasions, having concealed himself in a cistern, he had only just left his hiding-place when a woman to whom he had trusted for protection brought persons to secure him. At another time, his last resource was an appeal to the charity of a young but devout female, into whose house he was driven by the close pursuit of those engaged to take him. His age and character, and the danger he was in, were forcible appeals to the youthful devotee; and he is said to have been protected and nurtured by her with the tenderest filial affection, during most of his secret visits to Alexandria.

A. D. 360. After six years passed in the deserts, and in these oc-

* He has left, in one of his epistles, a strong and melancholy description of the miseries endured by his flock during his absence. Their houses were broken open in the dead of night; they were scourged without mercy; and the tenderest females were often so beaten in the face as to become unrecognisable by their friends.

casional journeys, Athanasius was encouraged by the death of Constantius and the accession of Julian, who boasted of his love of toleration, to return to his diocese. He was still further encouraged to do this, by the tidings he received of the death of George of Cappadocia, who had been placed in the episcopal chair of Alexandria by the hand of force, immediately after his expulsion. The violence which had been committed during his absence rendered his presence in every way needful for the encouragement of his harassed people, and his return was consequently hailed with expressions of universal delight.

But another change was about to take place in the affairs of the church, which once more compelled him to seek safety in flight. Julian affected a moderation which was far more specious than real. The avowed partisan of the pagans, he omitted no means which the most acute reason could suggest to root out Christianity from the world. Though less ferocious in his conduct than previous persecutors, he was not less inimical to the religion, nor more willing to tolerate its profession, where it could be stopped by measures which the state of the empire allowed him to employ. His favourite measure, of prohibiting the Christians from the study of the liberal arts, sufficiently indicates his disposition in this respect; and Athanasius, therefore, felt little surprise when he was acquainted by the governor of Egypt that the emperor had sent orders for his immediate expulsion from Alexandria. As he had no means of averting the stroke thus meditated against him, he yielded to the necessity of his condition, and returned to the deserts. Thither he was again pursued by his implacable persecutors, but succeeded as before in eluding their vigilance; and at the termination of Julian's brief reign he once more appeared among his flock, to the great discomfiture of the Arians. The reign of Jovian was still shorter than that of his predecessor; but it afforded a breathing-time to Athanasius and his oppressed people, and thus served to

establish them in their principles, and prepare them to sustain future troubles, if they should be again assailed. Happily, however, for them, the successors of Jovian, Valentinian and Valens, did not at first interfere to disturb their tranquillity. The former of these emperors was strongly attached to the Nicene faith, and was an advocate of universal toleration. From him, consequently, Athanasius and his party had nothing to fear, and so long as his brother Valens imitated his example, the church of Alexandria flourished in tranquillity. But the Arians having obtained the favour of the latter, it was again subjected to their machinations, and the aged bishop had once more to leave his faithful and disconsolate flock. The murmurs, however, which reached the ears of the emperor from all sides, convinced him that he had made a dangerous experiment on the disposition of the wealthy and powerful Alexandrians. He therefore reversed his edict; and Athanasius returned to his charge, having been concealed during the four months he was absent in his father's sepulchre. He was now permitted to pass the remainder of his days, which were fast drawing to a close, in peace; and in the month of May, 373, this laborious and distinguished minister of the Christian church was called from his exalted station to another world.

The character of Athanasius is represented under colours widely different, by the party of which he was the chief, and that to which he stood opposed through the whole of his eventful career. Enough, however, of his real disposition is apparent in his works, and in the narrative of those actions of his life which are undisputed, to enable us to judge with some degree of certainty respecting the principles by which he was actuated. The most sceptical cannot deny that he was a sincere and faithful believer in whatever he insisted upon as necessary to be received by others: there can be as little doubt of his learning and noble talents, or that the accusations made against him were founded on the malicious intentions of his enemies. But while his genius and virtues

claim our homage, it would be doing violence to the truth of history not to allow that the most convincing evidence exists of his overbearing disposition, of his readiness to use compulsion in the affairs of the church, and of a culpable want of charity towards those who opposed him. Such, however, was the disposition of the times, that he suffered little in his popularity from this severity of temper towards his adversaries; and the people of Alexandria, that large portion of them, at least, who favoured his cause, regarded him with unmingled affection throughout the long period during which he presided over their church. The apologies which he published in defence of his conduct, in the various reverses of his fortune, are well calculated to ensure him the veneration of posterity in all respects, except in that which pertains to his error in advocating a system of coercion. Even in regard to this, there are passages in his writings which show that he must either have been seduced into countenancing principles contrary to his natural disposition by the circumstances in which he was placed, or that he acted under a cloud of the most perfect self-deception; for while he was greatly deficient in moderation himself, he observed, when writing against the vindictive and dogmatical spirit of his enemies, that the devil alone was the true author of persecution!

But this brief sketch of the long and laborious career of Athanasius is sufficient to show the condition of the church in the fourth century, and to indicate the early appearance of a persecuting spirit among that class of men, who, above all others, were bound, both by principle and sound policy, to discourage any attempt to abridge the most perfect enjoyment of religious liberty. But though the bishop of Alexandria was the most conspicuous sufferer in the troubles of this period, and the Arian controversy that which gave birth to the most violent spirit of vindictiveness that had hitherto appeared to disturb the Christian church, Athanasius was far from being alone in the distresses to which he was so repeatedly exposed, nor was the dispute which divided

the community of the faithful into two great parties, either the only one, or the earliest, by which simple-minded Christians had been disturbed. It is worthy of notice, that among those who suffered from persisting in their virtuous resolution not to sign the condemnation of Athanasius, while they were convinced of his innocence, was Liberius, the bishop or pope of Rome. This distinguished man, on being summoned to Milan, whither he was carried almost as a prisoner, was forthwith placed before the tribunal of the emperor, who sternly ordered him to renounce further communion with the impious Athanasius. "All the other bishops have condemned him," said he; "why do you resist? Will you, for any scruple of your own, trouble the peace of the universe, which it is my duty to preserve undisturbed?" Liberius replied, that the judgments of ecclesiastics ought to be guided by the most rigorous attention to justice; that many of those who had signed the condemnation of Athanasius were not acquainted with the circumstances of the case; that they had been influenced, on the one hand, by the desire of possessing the bribes held out to them; and, on the other, by the fear of punishment, should they refuse to comply; and he added, with the firmness which became his character and office, that though he were alone in his resistance to the unjust procedure, the faith would still be preserved in safety, for it had already once happened that only three persons could be found who resisted an unjust ordinance. One of the bishops present immediately said, "Do you liken the emperor, then, to Nebuchadnezzar?"—"No," replied Liberius; "but to condemn a man unheard is to be guilty of an injustice similar to his." Constantius, enraged at the freedom and resolution which the pope displayed, sentenced him to be banished into Thrace, where he continued two years, at the end of which time, so little remained of the spirit which formerly distinguished the professors of Christianity, he purchased a reversal of his sentence, by agreeing to all the emperor and his ministers required.

The character of Liberius was that which appears to have been common to the greater number of ecclesiastics at this period. During his examination before the emperor, while insisting on the acquittal of Athanasius, he exhorted the monarch to employ the authority which he had received from God to enforce the universal reception of the Nicene creed. The dogmatic, persecuting spirit, which had already produced such deplorable consequences, was thus manifested by one of the very men who were now suffering the effects of its introduction. But, instead of this haughty and intolerant principle tending to establish those who encouraged it in an unchanging profession of the truth, it generally left them, like an exhausted stimulant, weak and wavering, when they were most in need of firmness and energy. This first era of persecution, therefore, is found to have been fruitful to excess in apostates and renegades from the faith. Hundreds of ecclesiastics signed and rejected the Nicene creed, at the instigation of the reigning monarch : pride rather than faith prompted them to clamorous professions of zeal ; and pride being formed of materials far less durable than faith, these loud and haughty preachers of conformity, these supplicants at the thrones of their monarchs for edicts against heresy, sunk into the earth at the prospect of one tithe of the evils which the humblest and weakest of the meek, faithful Christians of a former age had borne, and smiled under, with contented resignation. Liberius was far from being the only one, even of the most virtuous, of the followers of Athanasius, who recanted the principles, for the establishment of which they would have had the emperor publish an ordinance. The venerable bishop of Cordubá, even, who had suffered greatly in testimony of the truth during the reign of Dioclesian, and had reached the hundredth year of his life, — who had been the chief actor in the council of Nice, and was generally regarded as the firmest supporter Athanasius possessed, consented, after suffering a short imprisonment, to put his name to an Arian confession of faith ; and thus gave another proof,

though he afterwards expressed his repentance for what he had done, of how rare is the connection between a dogmatical and a firm and intrepid spirit.

In retracing our steps through the period in which Athanasius played so conspicuous a part, we find the disputes on the Arian question infecting every subject of history, and the sources of history itself. The reign of Constantius was distinguished by the most lamentable confusion, and the real interests of religion may therefore be considered to have long and materially suffered. Notwithstanding, however, the many vices of Constantius, and the injustice with which he treated the supporters of the Nicene creed, his enemies have been obliged to allow that he zealously exerted his power to establish the gospel against paganism; that he issued laws of the most useful tendency to this effect, and would have deserved the name of a firm champion of the church had he not been so deeply infected with heresy.* So impressed were some of his contemporaries with the virtues he exhibited, when called upon to defend Christianity against the false systems of the heathen, and the infidelity of sophists, that he is stated to have repented on his death-bed the part he had taken in the persecutions of the orthodox, and the introduction of new doctrines.† But this statement is strongly disputed by others; and it is shown, that he not only continued in his error to the last, but received baptism from an Arian bishop who had been repeatedly deposed.‡

Constantius was on his way towards Cappadocia, from the Persian war, when the disease attacked him which caused his death. Trembling at the tidings which were brought him of his nephew Julian, he had resolved to oppose his arms to the progress he was making in the western provinces. His death saved the empire from the miseries

* Baronius, *Annal. Eccles. an.* 361.

† His penitence is stated to have respected, first, his putting to death his unfortunate son-in-law; secondly, the appointment of Julian as his successor; and, thirdly, the offence above mentioned. *Greg. Nazian. Orat. in S. Athan.*

‡ *Athan. Lib. de Synod.* Gibbon doubts the publication of the laws against idolatry, c. 23.

of civil war ; but the accession of Julian once more exposed Christianity to the fury of idolaters. The character of the new emperor was calculated to inspire alarm ; but he for some time concealed, or subdued, the virulency of the dislike with which he regarded the church. Oppressed in his earliest youth by the jealousy of the reigning princes, it was natural for him to view with hatred the principles which they professed, and to the operation of which he might easily attach the notion of his own misfortunes. As he advanced towards manhood he found it necessary to dissemble his feelings, and that he might preserve the precarious dignity he enjoyed, to appear a Christian. Endowed as he was with a most active mind, with strong passions, and a tendency to enthusiasm, this necessity of professing a creed, and practising rites to conciliate the favour of the man whom he both feared and despised, was of all things the most likely to confirm him in disbelief. His first acquisition of power was attended with an announcement of his adherence to the old religion of paganism. In a letter to the philosopher Maximus, he says, that he publicly and openly worshipped the gods ; that as they commanded him to live purely and chastely, so he endeavoured to obey their mandates, and that he trusted to receive great rewards from them if he should not be slow in their service.* The full possession of imperial authority enabled him to commence the design he appears to have long cherished of attempting the restoration of idolatry. Having himself set the example of a zealous attention to all its practices, he issued orders for their general observance throughout the empire, directed that the temples which had fallen into ruins should be repaired ; and consecrated anew the various ranks of heathen priesthood.† The city of Cæsarea early experienced the effects of his ill-concealed intolerance. To revenge the destruction of two temples to Jupiter, which had been many years thrown down, he imposed the most oppressive burdens on the Christians, took possession of the wealth of the church, and com-

* Julian ad Max. apud Baron. Annal. Eccles. an. 361.

† Sozomen, lib. v. c. 3.

pelled the clergy to enrol themselves in the lowest ranks of the army.*

But Julian had too much keenness to persecute without caution ; and, unlike his predecessors, pursued his measures with the policy of one whose object it was to root out the religion, rather than take vengeance on those who professed it. Instead of giving the Christians opportunities of showing their constancy and fortitude in suffering, he sought to undermine their faith by a deceitful moderation, and by the application of arts which could excite no immediate alarm.

While burning with zeal for paganism, he recalled the numerous prelates and other distinguished Christians who had been sent into exile by Constantius, and both the orthodox and the Arians by turns participated in his clemency. When he found that mere example and persuasion failed to produce the change contemplated, he had recourse to a measure which it would have required, but for the shortness of his reign, the highest exercise of Christian wisdom to meet and overcome. The church by this time ranked among its members many of the most learned men of the age ; and the doctrines of the gospel were supported and expounded in language which would have done no discredit to the great masters of Greece or Rome. To strike at the root of the strength, which in his eyes depended chiefly on the nourishment thus contributed, Julian issued an order prohibiting the study of the ancient classics by Christian youths, and commanding that the public schools of the various professors should be closed against them.† The methods which the fathers of the church employed to destroy the force of this remarkable edict deserve to be mentioned. Unwilling to see the children of liberal parents deprived of their customary intellectual food, they wrote works themselves in imitation of the classics, and Apollinarius, a learned Syrian, produced not only a version of the ancient Jewish history in Homeric verse,

* Sozomen, lib. v. c. 4.

† Ibid. c. 18.

but odes in imitation of Pindar, tragedies like those of Euripides, and comedies to supply the place of those of Menander. The eloquent Basil and the graceful Nazianzen were employed at the same time in the defence of the church against its subtle enemy. But Julian was too deeply infected with the enmity he had imbibed in youth to be moved by either the piety or the eloquence of Christians; and when at Antioch, on his way to the seat of the Persian war, treated the faithful of that place with a severity in total contradiction to his pretended system of tolerance. Attributing, it is said, the silence of the oracle in the grove of Daphne to the burial of martyrs in that celebrated seat of pagan worship, he directed the coffin of Babylas, the most distinguished of the confessors, to be forthwith removed. The Christians assembled, and bore the remains of the saint with splendid solemnity to its new place of interment, the mingled multitude of worshippers, led by priests and virgins, chanting as they went the psalms which imprecate vengeance on the adorers of false gods. The people of Antioch had already irritated him by complaints respecting a want of provisions, and ridiculed his person in satires, which had sufficient bitterness to discompose his philosophic indifference. But instead of charging his troops to chastise the refractory populace, he had contented himself with writing a sarcastic answer to their abuse. The Christians, on the contrary, who composed the procession to the grave of Babylas, were treated with reckless cruelty; and instances of endurance are said to have occurred, which might remind Julian of the utter worthlessness of his power when exercised against a people thus always ready to meet it with untrembling fortitude.

The history of this period abounds with traditions of miraculous occurrences, a circumstance which may in some measure be accounted for, perhaps, by the consideration that Julian was not less superstitious than powerful, and that the Christians were brought into closer contention with him respecting objects of mere

outward reverence, than they had been with any preceding emperor. It was hence that, having heard of the statue of Christ, said to have been set up by the woman cured of the issue of blood, at Cæsarea Philippi, he displaced the image of the Saviour to set up his own on the same pedestal; and hence the story of its being hurled down by lightning, and of the miracles wrought at the foot of the statue of Christ. To the same cause may be ascribed his attempt, or determination, to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem, and his efforts to restore the oracle in the grove of Daphne.*

Julian left Antioch early in the spring, and had reached the confines of Persia at the head of his legions, when the enemy, having lured him into a defile, suddenly attacked him with an overwhelming force. In the midst of the battle the sky became black with clouds, the wind swelled into furious blasts, and the darkness of night mutually enveloped the combatants. At this moment, an unknown horseman darted full speed across the plain, and hurling his spear at the emperor, dashed him to the earth. Whether the horseman was a Persian or one of Julian's own soldiers has ever been a matter of doubt: but the wound he inflicted was mortal; and Julian, it is said, as he lay extended on the earth, catching the blood which flowed from his side, flung it towards heaven, and exclaimed, "Galilean, thou hast conquered!"†

* The three early historians, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret, together with numerous other writers who lived in or near the time of Julian, distinctly state, that the rebuilding of the temple was begun by his orders, and that the workmen were suddenly interrupted by an earthquake, and balls of fire bursting from the ground. Some judicious moderns, on the other hand, have contended that Julian had only declared his intention, and had not begun to put it in execution. This appears probable, both from the expressions made use of in his own letter on the subject, and from the circumstances of the time. But though many points in the narratives of the ancient writers may be reasonably objected to, as apparent exaggerations, the evidence in favour of the early statement seems greatly to outweigh the ingenious arguments advanced against it. Lardner, in his "Testimonies of Ancient Heathens," and Warburton, in "The Divine Legation of Moses," have both of them advocated the negative side at length. To these may be added Basnage, *Hist. des Juifs*.

† Sozomen, lib. vi. c. 2. Theodoretus mentions the various accounts given of the manner in which Julian met his death. Some reported it was by the hand of an angel, or a band of angels: others, that he was assailed by barbarians of the desert; and some, that his own soldiers, enraged by the privations they endured, thus freed themselves from his commands. Theodoretus, *Hist. Eccles.* lib. iii. c. 25. Of Julian's writings against the

It had been Julian's most earnest wish to secure the imperial crown for a successor whose zeal for paganism might equal his own. But the providence of God ordered it otherwise; and, to the great joy of the Christians, Jovian, a man of inferior rank but of talent and integrity, was elected by the unanimous voice of the army.* The situation of the troops, when they thus took upon them to name a sovereign for the vast empire of which they regarded themselves as the bulwark, was hopelessly gloomy; and the new made emperor was obliged to accept a peace which his enemies stigmatised as not less disgraceful to himself than dangerous to the state.† But whatever were the opinions taken of his conduct by the politicians of the age, the Christians were loud in their expressions of joy at the elevation of a man who had refused, it was said, to accept the diadem from the hands of the soldiers till they had professed their readiness to renounce the pollutions of paganism. Nor were they deceived in their hopes. Jovian's earliest care was directed to the state of the church; and the orthodox addressed him, by Athanasius, with confidence and freedom on the most important points of the Nicene confession. He received their admonitions with suavity and humility; but, while indicating his attachment to their party, had the good sense to proclaim himself the advocate of universal toleration. Scarcely had he thus restored confidence to the church, and gained the applause of the clergy by re-instating them in the peaceable enjoyment of their revenues, when he was taken off by a sudden death, before he had completed the first year of his reign.

Valentinian, a man of high rank and character, and who had exposed himself to trouble in the time of Julian, rather than compromise his principles, was chosen the successor of Jovian, and immediately associated with

Christians, several passages remain in the works of Cyril, who answered them. They are witty and sophistical; and such as a proud and ingenious man, prejudiced and powerful, might be expected to write

* Theodoretus, *Hist. Eccles.* lib. iv. c. l. Baronius, *Ann. Eccles.* an. 363.

† Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, c. 25.

himself his brother Valens. To him he committed the eastern provinces; and this imprudent exercise of fraternal affection was productive of evils which Christendom had long and deeply to deplore. Valens became one of the most bigoted of the Arians; and under his auspices the sectarists committed enormities which even heathen persecutors could scarcely have equalled. The first act of Valentinian, on reaching the seat of his government, was to superintend the election of a new bishop of Milan. Auxentius, the late possessor of the see, was strongly infected with Arianism; and the presence of heresy in the church had introduced almost every other species of disorder. The election of a bishop afforded a favourable opportunity for the display of party feeling, and the people tumultuously mingled their voices with the calm deliberations of the clergy. In the midst of the clamour, and when the Arians and the orthodox both appeared fixed in the resolution of electing one of their own party, a voice was heard in the crowd exclaiming, "Ambrose is bishop." The celebrated man, whose name was thus pronounced, was then sitting on the tribunal as the chief magistrate of the province. He had been appointed to that situation by the prefect of Gaul, was the descendant of a noble family, and had so rich a natural genius, that prodigies were told of his infancy, like those related of the poets of antiquity. For some time he resisted the call which the people made on all sides; but beholding the lamentable prospect which the church presented, he sacrificed his individual feelings, and having been baptized, for he was yet only a catechumen, received the episcopal consecration.*

The energetic appeal of the emperor to the eastern bishops, on the subject of the ruling disputes, would sufficiently show, had we no other document of the same kind, the disgraceful spirit of disorder which controversy had created in the church.† This address was founded on the decision of an Illyrian synod, and was

* Theodoretus, lib. iv. c. 7. Cave, Hist. Liter. art. Ambrose. Socrates, Hist. lib. iv. c. 30.

† Theodoretus, lib. iv. c. 8.

addressed in the name of Valens as well as in that of the elder sovereign. * But, notwithstanding the caution of the emperors, schism continued to spread its baneful influence throughout the church. Two new sects, the Audians, or Anthropomorphiti, and the Messalians, arose about the same time. By the principles of the one, God was described as having a human form and corporeal members; and those who composed the sect considered themselves too pure to hold commerce with the rest of the world. The Messalians indulged their minds in the worst species of mysticism, believed themselves constantly under the impulse of supernatural agencies, and, on that account, treated with contempt the most sacred ordinances of the church. They were driven out of Syria by the influence of Flavian, afterwards bishop of Antioch, and soon after diffused their opinions through Pamphylia.* But it was not from the errors of weak enthusiasts that the church could receive any material injury. The Arian disputes were the inexhaustible source to which the author of evil was still to resort. Valens, whose mind, it appears, was little qualified for the discussion of abstruse questions, had hitherto adhered closely to the orthodox opinions. By the persuasions of his wife, who had been taught the system by Eudoxius, bishop of Constantinople, he was induced to examine the doctrines of Arius; and, previously to his setting out for the seat of war in Germany, received baptism from that prelate. Zealous above measure in the support of his new creed, he commenced by banishing all the members of the orthodox party from Constantinople; sending several of the most eminent bishops into distant exile: among these were Eusebius of Samosatis, a man so beloved by his people, that he was obliged to employ stratagems to save the officers who apprehended him from destruction; Pelagius of Laodicea, and Meletius of Antioch. Barses, bishop of Edessa, was the next victim of intolerance; and his banishment was followed by a general attack on the

* Theodoretus, lib. iv, c. 8.

defenceless inhabitants, who, though spared death, were subjected to evils scarcely less to be dreaded. Antioch, and other places, suffered in a similar manner; and the barbarities of the day are said to have been crowned by the murder of no less than eighty Christian ministers, by a single contrivance of Arian fury. These victims to the intolerance of the emperor had ventured to seek him in his palace at Nicomedia, and present a series of written complaints against the agents of his cruelty. Enraged at their temerity, he sent secret orders to Modestus, the prefect of Edessa, to apprehend and put them to death. The magistrate, fearing the consequence of an open execution, condemned them to banishment; but the sailors who navigated the vessel in which they were transported received directions to set fire to the ship when out at sea, and leave them to their fate. The order was punctually executed, and the whole perished in the flames.*

The sect of the Novatians suffered considerably during this persecution of the orthodox, and a strong testimony is thereby given to the purity of their faith. Persecution had, indeed, again brought Christian virtue into full exercise; and several of the greatest men that the church ever produced now stood forth with all the energy of natural talent, and the fortitude of evangelical piety, to support the primitive truth. Even while we are frequently constrained to lament the show of passion and proud austerity which, in some instances, mingled like a leaven with their virtues, it is impossible not deeply to sympathise with those who dared to stand forward in defence of their opinions and freedom against the direct, as well as derived power, of such tyrants as Valens. When the sees of Alexandria and Constantinople became vacant, the emperor appointed Arians to fill them; but the orthodox elected tried members of the church to those high situations, and preferred encountering the danger which they knew must follow, to yielding in a matter of such importance to their cause.

* Socrates, lib. iv. c. 16.

Even the inhabitants of the desert were not free from the scourge. Arianism had reached some of these solitaries; but the greater portion remained faithful to the church, and defied the power of the tyrant's lieutenant, by offering to die rather than abandon the Nicene creed.*

Valens was at length compelled to desist from being a persecutor, and take measures for the suppression of the Goths, who were making rapid inroads on the empire. Desirous, it is probable, of soothing the minds of the orthodox before his departure for the seat of war, he allowed several of the prelates he had banished to return to their dioceses; and the Arian bishop of Alexandria was obliged to vacate his throne for Peter, who had been elected by the opposite party. Valentinian died in the year 375, and Valens fell in battle in 378.

The empire was now divided between Gratian, the eldest son of Valentinian, his brother Valentinian, who ruled in the West, and Theodosius, whom he chose as his colleague in the East.† The first and last of these princes were devoutly attached to the orthodox tenets; and under their reign the church recovered from the confusion into which it had been thrown by the systematic opposition of Valens. Gratian put himself, with filial reverence, under the instruction of Ambrose, who wrote his treatise on the divinity of the Holy Ghost expressly at his request. But this pious sovereign was murdered in his attempt to subdue the rebellion of Maximus, in 383; and for some time Justina, the mother of young Valentinian, again wasted the strength of the church by her attempts to restore the Arian ascendancy. In this she was firmly opposed by Ambrose, whom she in vain sought to expel from his bishopric. Fearless of the consequences, he intrepidly declared, when his church was surrounded by imperial troops, that he would never willingly leave the flock of Christ to be devoured by wolves. But Justina was resolved upon executing her purpose; and trusting that, by adding

* Sozomen, lib. vi, c. 20.

† Theodoretus, lib. v. c. 1.

the aid of a keen sophist to the authority of her station, success would be made certain, she invited the Arian Auxentius, a Scythian by birth, to challenge him to dispute before the emperor on the subject in question. Ambrose replied, with dignity, that the emperor was not to be constituted a judge in such matters; and Justina was left to depend solely on the illegal exercise of authority. Again demanding the resignation of the churches in Milan, and again meeting with a refusal, the basilica, or cathedral, in which Ambrose had shut himself up, was once more surrounded by the military. But he continued firm to his purpose; while the people, devoted to their prelate, gave daily proofs of their attachment, by exposing themselves to imprisonment, and every other species of oppression, rather than assent to the Arian dogmas. The united popularity and fortitude of the bishop rendered his forcible deposition too perilous an experiment for even Justina to make; and his influence being required to stop the threatened invasion of Maximus, he was finally left in the peaceable enjoyment of his authority. The youthful Valentinian himself, made acquainted with the true merits of the prelate by his colleague Theodosius, only lived long enough to win his regards, and obtain, in dying, a valuable testimony of his pious affection.*

A.D. 381. Theodosius, some time before he was thus left sole master of the empire, had resolved upon summoning a general council, finally to settle, if possible, the disputes which had so long desolated the church. A hundred and fifty prelates attended his summons at Constantinople; and Meletius, the venerable bishop of Antioch, whom Theodosius is stated to have seen in a vision, was chosen president of the synod. He died before the conclusion of the session; and a difference occurring respecting the appointment of his successor, the assembly was dissolved, and only met the following year to dispute against the admirable Gregory of Nazianzen, who had been placed on the episcopal throne

* Ambrose, Ep. 34., and De Obitu Valentiniani.

in the year 380, and was now constrained to resign his station by the strong party who supported, against his opinion, the late election of Flavian to the see of Antioch. In 383 another council was called*, by the decisions of which those of Nice were confirmed, and several new canons established in reference to the principal heresies of the day. By these regulations it was ordained, that Arians, Macedonians, Novatians, Sabatians, Quartodecimani, Tetratites, and Apollinarians, should, on renouncing their errors, be admitted into the church by the unction of the Holy Spirit, and their anointment with the holy chrism on the forehead, eyes, hands, mouth, and ears, these words being, in the mean time, pronounced:—"This is the seal of the Holy Spirit." The Montanists, Sabellians, Eunomians, and others, were regarded as separated from the church at a far wider interval, and were to be received with the same restrictions as persons converted from paganism.

The possession of supreme and undivided authority, enabled Theodosius to put yet more extensive plans in execution for the support of the church. Idolatry was still practised to a considerable extent in various parts of the empire. In the Roman senate there were those who attributed all the misfortunes which had of late years afflicted the world to the overthrow of the pagan altars; and in Egypt†, and other provinces of the East, the ancient superstitions still held undisputed sway over the prostrate intellects of a large portion of the people. By an edict of the emperor, the temples were ordered to be forthwith closed, and the most celebrated of Egypt were levelled with the dust. Death was the penalty demanded of those who should be guilty of sacrificing, and proportionate punishments were enacted for the offence of offering incense, or performing any

* These several meetings are not distinguished by the historians, Sozomen, Theodoretus, and Socrates, in their account of the council. Theod. lib. v. c. 8. Sozomen, lib. vii. c. 12. Socrates, lib. v. c. 10.

† Socrates, Hist. Eccles. lib. v. c. 16. The contest which took place between the Christians of Alexandria and the pagan inhabitants of that place ended in the destruction of the temples there; but the triumph was stained with a copious effusion of human blood.

of the inferior rites of paganism. To the people of Rome he declared that he would no longer supply the sums which had hitherto been granted by the state for the support of the ceremonies, and the denial of this was to abolish them.

A long experience had taught him the danger of contending with many adverse sects, and the difficulty of subduing them by the exercise of authority. On nominating his son Arcadius to the succession, therefore, he wisely endeavoured to conciliate the heads of the various parties. Nectarius, bishop of the Novatians, attended his invitation; and from his lips Theodosius learnt the canon by which he was to frame his future discussions with the separatists. But Nectarius was sincerely desirous of peace; and the concessions he had expressed himself willing to make were firmly opposed by the rest. In the assembly which was held, at the imperial palace, to examine the opinions of which each sect had sent in its abstract, Nectarius and Agelius represented the Consubstantialists, Demophilus the Arians, Eunomius the party to which he had given a name, and Eleusius of Cyzicus the Macedonians. No permanent advantage could be expected, perhaps, from such a meeting, without a much greater preparation of both mind and heart than appears to have preceded it; but it had a temporary influence on many of the disputants, and its origination did credit to the liberal policy of the emperor.

The reigns of Gratian and Theodosius had freed the advocates of the Nicene creed from the dangers and calamities under which they so long groaned; and the milder and more Christian spirit which inspired some of the most influential of the clergy, greatly tempered the rancour of theological hatred. But men had now been so long accustomed to regard it as a part of their positive duty to arm themselves against those of a different denomination, that even the pious and excellent Ambrose, the greatest ornament of the church at this period, thought it necessary to urge his imperial master to measures savouring strongly of the principles which

in other respects he opposed. It happened that a Jewish synagogue, and a meeting-house belonging to some sectarians, in Callinicum, a small town on the borders of Persia, were destroyed in a popular tumult, and Theodosius, acting from a principle of natural justice, directed that the offenders should either rebuild the edifices, or pay a proportionable fine to the injured parties; but Ambrose, on becoming acquainted with the circumstance, addressed the emperor in an epistle remarkable for severity of language, and for the want of charity in its sentiments. Forbidding him to punish the offenders, he informed him that the toleration of the Jewish religion was the persecution of Christianity, and reprobated, in the strongest terms, his intention of inflicting a fine on the bishop of Callinicum, who, it appears, was the principal instigator of the tumult. He further added, that if he persisted in so doing he would injure irreparably the cause of his own fame and salvation; and that so convinced was he of the rectitude of those who had committed the supposed offence, that not only he but every one who valued himself on the profession of the faith, would be proud to share the praise which was due to the accused, and the crown of martyrdom which they might be condemned to wear. Nor was this all: Theodosius, at first, either considered the observations of the prelate expended upon a subject which scarcely merited his attention, or felt anxious to let the discussion pass off without being obliged to notice it, and thereby risk the alternative of offending his favourite bishop, or committing an act of flagrant injustice. But Ambrose was not to be thus thwarted. He made the circumstance the subject of an address from the pulpit, and even proceeded to the extremity of refusing to perform the most solemn rites of religion, till Theodosius passed his imperial word that the bishop and monks of Callinicum should suffer no inconvenience for their late conduct.

We should be disposed, from this anecdote, to rank the bishop of Milan among the weakest of men, and the

most bigoted of persecutors, were we not possessed of many evidences of his superior ability, and, what is of more importance, of his hatred to cruelty and personal violence. A memorable instance both of his virtue and magnanimity, in this respect, occurs in the history of the emperor's conduct towards the unfortunate inhabitants of Thessalonica. Offended by some opposition to their wishes during the public games, by Bothenus, the general in command of the garrison, the great mass of the population of that flourishing city suddenly rose against the offending officer, and murdered him, together with several of his guards. Theodosius, instead of enquiring into the circumstances of the case, or endeavouring to discover who were the persons really deserving condign punishment, sent secret orders to the garrison to prepare for a general massacre of the inhabitants. To secure the complete execution of this measure, notice was given, that the public games would take place in the circus on the day intended for the execution of the dreadful design. The people, little suspecting the treachery of the barbarians, received the intimation with the usual expressions of satisfaction ; and at the time appointed, the arena was surrounded by a dense multitude, composed of persons of either sex, and of all ages. At the signal agreed upon, the soldiers, thirsting for revenge, rushed in upon the panic-struck and defenceless crowd. Heaps of bodies, in a few minutes, covered the ground. Old men and children, and the numerous women who had eagerly run to see the spectacle, all fell instant sacrifices to the indiscriminating fury of the assailants. Those whose age and strength prompted them to a momentary resistance, only fell worse mangled by the weapons of their enemies ; and before the slaughter ceased more than 7000 persons lay weltering in their blood.

Theodosius, it is said, had no sooner given the order for this frightful massacre than he repented, and sent to countermand it ; but the messenger, to whom the new mandate was intrusted, did not arrive at Thessalonica

till the work was done. The emperor, therefore, had to bear the reproaches of his conscience as he best could ; and that which was scarcely less difficult, the justly severe chidings of his episcopal counsellors. Ambrose, on being made acquainted with the occurrence, felt all the grief of a parent who, after striving to implant the principles of piety in his son's heart, sees him suddenly converted into a monster of barbarity. Unable to endure society under the weight of this affliction, he retired to his residence in the country, and thence wrote to Theodosius, declaring that he was resolved not to admit him again to a participation in the holy mysteries. " I greatly love and regard you," said the venerable old man, " but you must not think it strange if I give God the preference." To add greater authority to his declarations he asserted, and it is probable the strong excitement of his mind at the time might give a species of truth to the assertion, that he had been directed to act thus by a celestial vision. Theodosius, however, imagined that, having signified his sorrow for the error he had committed, he might resume his ordinary devotions in the place of public worship, without interruption or reproach ; but in this he was mistaken. Ambrose, on being made acquainted that he was approaching the cathedral, met him in the porch, and forbade his further entrance. To the argument which the sovereign offered in support of his claims to pardon, and which was drawn from the life of David, the prelate answered, " You have, indeed, imitated the king of Israel in the sin of homicide ; it remains for you to imitate him in his repentance." Thus urged by the arguments, and the stern but sometimes pathetic exhortations of Ambrose, the emperor found his pride fast giving way to his repentance and devotion ; and he at length signified to the bishop, that he was ready to submit to whatever penance he might think proper to impose. Any man less firm in the performance of his duty than Ambrose would have been induced, by the willing humility of his sovereign, to use every expedient to

save him any further prostration of dignity ; but the bishop of Milan was inflexible. He forthwith directed the monarch to perform all the ceremonies of a public penance, and to promise also that he would thenceforth never allow a capital sentence to be put in execution till thirty days after it had been passed,—a wise and invaluable safeguard to his subjects against any future ebullition of his mad passions.*

It may be easily supposed from these accounts that the advocates of the Nicene creed had, at the period of which we are speaking, all the advantages they could desire from the favour of the sovereign. The Arians, on the contrary, had every thing to dread, and nothing to hope. Their bishops were driven from the dioceses they occupied to make room for those of the dominant party ; banishment was the punishment of such as would not consent to change their sentiments and embrace those of Athanasius ; penalties of a still heavier kind were threatened by the edicts, and the scourge of persecution was continually sounding in the ears of the lately triumphant heretics. By the common consent, however, of the historians of the time, Theodosius is to be regarded as a persecutor, rather in his words than in his actions. Few of the threats contained in his ordinances were ever executed ; and though he denied the Arians the use of the churches, he employed no inquisitorial activity to watch their proceedings, or prevent their assembling at the stated periods of worship. Still, to a people possessed of clear views on the subject of religious toleration, and long accustomed to its enjoyment, there is something sufficiently odious in the unscriptural assumption of authority by Theodosius over the consciences of so many of his subjects : though it was not exercised greatly to their injury, it was an explicit denial of their right to worship their Maker, as he appeared revealed to them by the light of Scripture ; and they were thus removed, as it were, from the jurisdiction of the Almighty, to answer for their faith to a

* Theodoretus, lib. v. c. 17, 18.

being fallible as themselves, but who, in the awful language of Scripture, “sat in the temple of God, showing himself as God,” by authoritatively determining, as an infallible being, what was to be believed and what not. It never ought, indeed, to be lost sight of, whenever the dictatorship of the Roman pontiffs is made a subject of consideration, that the worst feature of their usurpation had been already exhibited by the temporal rulers of the world.

CHAP. VI.

Numerous Heresies. — Opinions of the Fathers on the Martyrdoms of Heretics. — Controversies on the Subject. — Account of the Donatists. — Their Superstition and Voluntary Sufferings. — The Priscillians. — Writers of this Age. — Discipline.

THE last chapter has been chiefly occupied with details of the troubles which arose in the church from the heresy of Arius. But, unfortunately for the Christian world, the errors he introduced form but a small portion of the corruptions of simple evangelical truth, to which the pride of some, and the credulous curiosity, the worldly discontent, or enthusiasm of others, gave birth in this century. The Arians were early divided on the chief points of their system; and each party taking the name of its leader, or one derived from its principal dogma, the list of heresies, belonging to this class alone, becomes of formidable length. It is, however, considered that they may be comprehended under the three divisions of Arians, semi-Arians, and Aetians or Eunomians.* The main tenet of the first was, that the Son, by the will of the Father, existed before all ages, the only begotten God, unchangeable; but that, before he was begotten or created, he was not.† The semi-Arians

* Mosheim, cent. iv. part ii. c. 5.

† This occurs in Arius's own account of his doctrine in a letter to Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia. Ap. Epiph. 69. n. 6.

allowed that the Son was similar in essence to the Father, but only by privilege ; while the Eunomians or Aetians, as they were severally called, from the names of their principal defenders, denied his similarity to the Father altogether. The orthodox branded them with the title of Atheist: even the Arians themselves regarded this last-mentioned doctrine with horror, and Constantius, struck with its impiety, banished its originator, Aetius, into Phrygia.* He was, however, recalled by Julian ; and his disciple Eunomius secured for his opinions a permanent place among the dogmas of the age.

The Macedonians were a branch of the Semi-arians and were headed by Macedonius, bishop of Constantinople ; from which dignity he was driven through the influence of the Eunomians. His opinions, it appears, were at first little regarded, but grew into importance from the opposition they excited.† According to him, the Holy Ghost was no more than a divine energy diffused through every portion of the universe, and his followers were hence sometimes called Pneumatomachians.

Apollinarius, another remarkable man among the schismatics of the day, was bishop of Laodicea, when he began to publish his opinions respecting the person of Christ. Confining himself chiefly to speculations on the manner by which the divine nature became united to the human in the Redeemer, he lost himself in the dark and complicated passages into which human reason is so soon tempted when engaged on such subjects. His principal dogma was, that Christ had not a rational soul, but that the Deity, which was present to his animal frame, supplied the place of that rational spirit, which completes the being of other men.‡ He is also stated to have affirmed, that Christ brought the body in which he lived from heaven, and that he suffered as

* Theodoretus, lib. ii. c. 29. Socrates, lib. ii. c. 35.

† Ibid. lib. iv. c. 4.

‡ Theodoretus, lib. v. c. 3. Socrates, lib. ii. c. 46. The latter writer states that Apollinarius at first denied the presence of a human soul altogether ; but, struck with a sense of the impiety of this opinion, at last admitted that there was one in Christ, but not a rational one.

Deity. The writers who have mentioned his doctrines speak of him with respect, notwithstanding his errors ; and it appears to have been generally considered that he erred rather from an eager desire to make mysteries clear, than from a wish to oppose them.*

The heresy of Photinus, bishop of Sirmium, is said by St. Jerom to have approached in impiety that of the ancient Ebionites. But from the simple statement given of his opinions in the context, he appears to have wholly denied the divinity of our Lord ; adding such explications of his doctrine as served to prevent its being compared nakedly with Scripture, and to give theorists an idea of its mystical sublimity. He has been classed with Sabellius, with Paul of Samosata, and others ; but whatever were his opinions, little doubt can be entertained of his honesty, resigning as he did, after a long contest, his rank and diocese, rather than make peace with the heads of the church by a compromise of his doctrines.

Of the disputes which were occasioned by the deposition and rival elections of bishops in this age, it will be sufficient to state, that they more than once equalled in obstinacy those of a purely doctrinal nature. From the ejection of Meletius, bishop of Lycopolis, arose a sect which continued to disturb the church for near two centuries : from that of Lucifer of Cagliari sprung another, which also became the seed of future schisms ; as from a nearly similar source did the Eustathians and the Eusebians.

Respecting the general character and habits of these various sects we unfortunately know little. Their struggles to support themselves in such periods of fierce controversy as those in which they arose must have frequently been severe trials of constancy ; but we have not sufficient information whereby to determine either their amount of suffering or fortitude in endurance.

It was a favourite maxim with St. Cyprian, “ that he who is not united with the church cannot be a

* See Lardner's *Credibility*, Works, iv. 350.

martyr; that he may be put to death, but cannot be crowned." St. Augustine, repeating this sentiment, observes, that "it is not the torment which a man suffers, but the cause for which he suffers, which makes him a martyr;" and this opinion, so closely in harmony with the severe and exclusive spirit of ancient orthodoxy, was regarded as an incontrovertible axiom by most of the fathers of the church. "Heretics are exiles and aliens from truth," says the eloquent and impassioned Optatus; "and well is it that they are prevented from labouring in the vineyard, who are strangers to the garden and paradise of God."* The refusal of their contemporaries, or those who afterwards wrote the history of the periods in which they lived, to rank them with other sufferers in the cause of religion, is probably one of the best reasons that can be given for the doubt which is entertained concerning the martyrdoms of the early schismatics. A controversy respecting this subject was carried on to a considerable length by the famous Maimbourg, and the Calvinist historian Jurieu.† They were afterwards joined by other writers of their respective parties; and the question whether the heretical sects had any claim to the notice of martyrologists, was disputed with an earnestness that would not have disgraced St. Cyril or St. Augustine. Maimbourg, in order to destroy the argument which the protestants employed in reference to their numerous martyrs, observed, in his history of Calvinism, that the author of that system condemned Servetus to be burnt, but, according to the maxim of the ancient fathers, would not allow him the title of martyr, any more than he would the Marcionites, and many other early heretics, who suffered with an incredible ardour the most cruel deaths for their own sect. Jurieu observes on this passage, that he did not suppose an instance of such prodigious ignorance was ever seen in a man pretending to write, or of such hardihood in an author

* Cyprian. Op. Epist. Optatus, De Schis. Donatist.

† Histoire du Calvinisme et du Papisme. Rotterdam, 1683.

who must have known that his book would be examined with attention. "The Marcionites," says he, "readily exposed themselves to die for their sect." We must here first remark, that the Marcionites had their reign in the first and second centuries, in which the Christians were under the cross. How then could they subject the Marcionites and other heretics to punishment, when they had neither judges nor tribunals, and were themselves continually exposed to death? We must further remark, that in the age when the Marcionites flourished, the morals of the church were so severe, that the generality of Christians believed it unlawful for them to exercise the functions of magistrates. Is it to be believed, that if they would not condemn even malefactors to death, they would have exercised that rigour towards heretics? But, above all, the Marcionites were a branch of the Gnostics; and the common notion of the Gnostics was, "that God is not desirous of the blood of Christians, and that Jesus Christ does not demand our death as the price of salvation." M. Jurieu next quotes Tertullian, to prove that most of the heretical sects in times of persecution joined with the persecutors, in order to save themselves from harm; and then challenges his adversary to produce any proof from history, that, with the exception of some Spanish heretics in the fourth century, the ancient sectarians suffered persecution from other Christians.*

To these observations, Maimbourg and his apologists replied, that though the Christians of the second century might not have it in their power to condemn heretics, it was not to be concluded therefrom that the heretics did not suffer as was alleged; for all that M. Maimbourg intended to say was, that the Marcionites, though heretics, suffered death with astonishing firmness and ardour, no mention being made of those who condemned them. In answer, also, to the observation respecting the professed aversion of the primitive schismatics to

* See also Bayle, article "Marcion."

expose themselves in times of persecution, a remarkable passage is very properly cited from Eusebius, in which that ancient historian quotes an author who, in writing against the Phrygists, says, "After they have been convicted on all the points I have mentioned, and have nothing to answer, they allege their martyrs, affirming that they have many, and that this plainly proves the power of the prophetic spirit which they pretend is prevalent in their party. But, in my opinion, they are mistaken, for the followers of other heresies also boast of having many martyrs; and yet we do not go over to their opinion, nor even confess that the truth is on their side. The Marcionites say, that they have many martyrs of Jesus Christ, notwithstanding they are of a religion contrary to that of Jesus Christ." St. Augustine, who mentions that crowds of Donatists would expose themselves to death during the pagan persecutions, is quoted to the same purpose; and the conclusion to which both M. Maimbourg and his associates come, is, that many heretics, no doubt, suffered for their faith: but that, as the fathers said, it is not the torment but the cause for which it is suffered that makes a man a martyr.*

It is to be regretted that we possess such imperfect means for forming a judgment on the conduct of those who dissented from the main body of the Christian church when exposed to persecution. There are many circumstances, however, which render this less a subject of surprise than regret. It is evident, from the sentiments of the ancient theologians above cited, that, however great might be the firmness or devotion of the persons termed heretics, their fortitude would obtain little praise from those who regarded them as sacrificing their lives to propagate error rather than defend the truth. Whatever number, therefore, of schismatics fell in the early persecutions, there is every reason to expect that the notices of their sufferings would be few and uncertain. As to the question whether many of them

* The passage occurs Hist. Eccles. lib. v. c. 16.

did undergo the punishments which it is alleged they incurred in common with other Christians, we must be careful to form our answer on a consideration of the circumstances in which they were placed, rather than from the loose and doubtful assertions of those engaged in controverting or defending their principles.

Looking at the subject in this point of view, it is to be remembered that the schismatics were necessarily few in number when compared with the orthodox Christians; and experience shows that the resolution or fortitude, from whatever source it springs, which enables men to encounter violent suffering, is greatly augmented by the fervour of spirit which is so rapidly propagated and renewed when it inspires a numerous multitude. The schismatics wanted this strong impulse to martyrdom: sympathy and brotherly affection, which in the case of other Christians co-operated with the higher and more spiritual motives to constancy, were counteracted in their minds by the feeling that they were not a part of the church; and in so far as human nature had the predominance over the inspirations of piety, they would be disposed to leave the society which had rejected them from its communion, to suffer the dangers as well as enjoy the glory of its pre-eminence. Another, and a still stronger reason for supposing that the martyrs of the early sects were few, may be derived from our knowledge of the nature of their schism. With the exception of the Donatists, the ancient heretics appear to have been wholly intent on establishing certain explications of the more mysterious doctrines of Christianity on the foundation of philosophy, or abstruse reasoning. Such seems to have been the object of the Gnostics, the Manichees, the Nestorians, and, in fact, of all the dissentients from the primitive and simple apostolic creed. But how little do we need to prove, that it is not from speculation that the faith arises which conducts to martyrdom. The doubtfulness which first induces a man to separate himself from the general communion will, in most cases, have some degree of influence over his mind,

whatever be the party to which he attaches himself. This will occur when he is led to speculate on the subject of his faith by mere accident, or external circumstances : but dissent, in some persons at least, is more frequently the result of a natural disposition to enquiry or speculation than of accident ; and in such cases scepticism will be the leaven of the mind, however ardently it may engage in the defence of opinions opposed to those which it has lately thrown aside. A simple, earnest belief in the main doctrines of salvation was the distinguishing characteristic of that multitude of martyrs whose names are known to us : deep speculation and scepticism, under various forms and modifications, were the qualities which distinguished the leaders of those sects whose right to a martyrology has been so warmly disputed. It may, therefore, be fairly doubted, whether the maxim which is positively ascribed to the Gnostics was not common, in practice at least, to most of the other sectarians.* They had fewer motives to brave danger, they had less confidence in their principles ; and the cause which they desired to establish was to be promoted by a diligent employment of learning and subtle thought, rather than by examples of humble and pious resignation.

But though we may thus have cause to believe that but few suffered for the Christian faith who dissented from the orthodox party, there is no reason to doubt but that those few evinced the same fortitude, the same conscientious devotion to principle, as the martyrs of the general church. Allowing that the maxim of Cyril and Augustine is correct, and that it is not the pain, but the cause, which makes a martyr, yet we may ask, how can this be applied to deprive men of the honours of martyrdom who were willing to die rather than change their faith ? Or is it accordant with common justice to deny the praise of devotion to those who gave as high a proof of their sincerity as can possibly

* Namely, that God did not desire man to become a sacrifice for principle.

be given by a human being? All that we can rightly say is, that if the principles for which they suffered were not in themselves good, they cannot be looked upon with the gratitude and veneration which we must feel for those to whom we owe the establishment of doctrines essential to our virtue or our happiness: but looking at them as men suffering for what they believed to be true, they demand our respect, and, since they afforded examples of constancy and fortitude, at all times valuable, constituted as we are, they have an equal right to our gratitude; so that though those who died for the faith to which we ourselves assent claim in the highest degree our affection and veneration, those who suffered with the same constancy in support of other principles merit a proportionable share of our admiration and praise: the former standing first in our esteem, because they helped to establish our faith, as well as left us an example of constancy; the latter in an inferior station, inasmuch as it is their example only which claims our regard. But, according to the author of the "*Apologie pour les Réformateurs*," it is impossible that the constancy of a heretic should be any thing but madness and folly, or that he should be inspired to die for his heresy by the spirit of God, or the movements of his grace; and he, consequently, ascribes all instances of such martyrdoms to the effects of cupidity, a violent desire of vain glory, or some other passion of the same kind, equally low and terrestrial. In the same manner, after describing the characteristics of a true martyr in the hour of death, he triumphantly demands, "Is it possible that the spirit of deceit and illusion, of error and obstinacy, should produce the same movements in a heretic? Is it possible, in short, that a heretic should appear before the public full of joy, blessing God, praying for his persecutors, singing sacred hymns, and proceeding to death with more pleasure than others would escape from it? This, I sustain, is impossible," observes M. Jurieu; and he concludes that the ancients did not mean by their celebrated maxim merely to distinguish those who suf-

ferred for the truth from those who suffered for error, but to mark the difference between those who died for justice, and those who suffered for their crimes. We have already seen, that, as early as the first century of the Christian era, certain disputatious spirits had arisen in the church, whose proceedings materially affected the unity and internal peace of the infant establishment. The Gnostics, the Nicolaitans, the followers of Cerinthus, and the Ebionites, followed hard upon the apostles themselves; and these early preachers of error were succeeded by Basilides, Marcion, Bardesanes, and the far more celebrated Manes or Manicheans.* Learning and philosophy have both expended some of their richest stores in the examination of the doctrines which are supposed to have been professed by these various sects; and every intimation we possess of their character leads to the conclusion, that whatever were the intentions or the moral dispositions of their authors, they were essentially opposed to the simple character of the primitive Christian faith. But the church considered the most important part of the religion of the gospel to consist in its precepts of resignation to the plain but brief revelations of the Deity. That it should regard such reasoners, therefore, with suspicion, can admit of no doubt; and it was natural, that when it found them attempting to subvert the faith of humble converts, or leading those to dispute who had scarcely learnt the principles of their profession, it should use all lawful expedients to prevent the progress of the schism. Very far, however, were the first directors of the Christian church from being persecutors; their only object was to defend it against the introduction of error; and they employed the means which reason and custom suggest for the maintenance of peace and unity in any society whatever. They had neither the power nor, as it would seem, the inclination to use violence against those who dissented from their body, but they were bound not to hold communion with persons as members of the church who

* Beausobre, *Histoire du Manichéisme*.

were known to oppose its doctrines; and they therefore signified, by a mode of expression common to their age, and accordant with the customs of other religious societies, that those who thus upheld principles unknown to the fathers were separated from the main body of the faithful. So long as this was done solely from the pure and conscientious motive of preserving the church from the agitations engendered by unquiet spirits, no offence was committed against private liberty. Those who doubted were exposed to no other penalty than that which, if their objections were sincere, could scarcely be felt as a hardship; that is, they were separated from a communion with which they had previously ceased to have any real or proper connection.

But such is the tendency of human nature to convert necessary precautions into food for unnecessary severity, that there is reason to fear, that as the principles of Christian practice began to lose ground in other respects, it was also corrupted in this, and that orthodoxy was at a very early period made a pretence for measures scarcely conformable with the mild spirit of the gospel. But however this may have been, there is not the smallest reason for the conjecture that the first Christians exercised against each other any personal violences, or that the church viewed its anathemas in any other light than simple forms of expulsion from its communion. If any of the ancient heretics, therefore, suffered for their religion, it must, doubtless, have been at the hands of the heathen persecutors; and that there is reason to believe that some of them did so suffer has been already shown.* But the allusion to the martyrdom of the earlier sectarians, by Eusebius, is too brief to make us acquainted with the circumstances under which they fell victims to persecution; and from the manner in which the passage quoted above is worded, it may be questioned, whether it ought to be regarded as implying more than

* The Novatians, it has been before mentioned, were frequent sharers in the sufferings of the orthodox.

that the heretics boasted of having had martyrs among them. When, however, we arrive at the period in which the Donatists flourished, all doubt vanishes as to the subject of heretical martyrdoms. This does not affect the argument, that none of the other sectarians willingly suffered death in defence of their opinions; for, as far as we can discover the characters of these dissentients, the Gnostics, the Manicheans, and others, were as opposite to the Donatists, as the cool, sceptical Socinian is to the wild Anabaptist of Germany.

The origin of this sect may in some degree account for the zeal, though scarcely for the strange enthusiasm, subsequently exhibited by its members. Donatus, its founder, was one of the Numidian bishops who opposed, with just indignation, the advancement of such of the African clergy as had weakly delivered up the Scriptures in the Dioclesian persecution, and who were thence generally stigmatised with the title of Traditors. By his influence, the opposition excited against the election of one or two obnoxious individuals was quickly extended into a dangerous schism; and in a few years Africa was over-run by a party whose zeal rapidly degenerated into the worst species of licentiousness. Under the name of Circumcelliones, the most furious of these fanatics commenced a war against those who opposed them in opinion, which was in no respect less disgraceful to human feeling than the most violent of civil strifes. The laws which the emperor Constantine had deemed it necessary to enact against them had probably no slight influence in inflaming the sectaries to this degree of violence; and he was induced, by the persuasions of some wise and moderate men, to restore to the Donatists the privileges of which he had deprived them. But the flame of discord had been lit, and it was not now to be easily extinguished. Donatus, surnamed the Great, and the other bishops who had espoused his opinions, vehemently resisted the proffered terms of reconciliation, and the Circumcelliones pursued the course they had begun, of terror and bloodshed.

The attempts made by the successor of Constantine to pacify these malecontents proved equally abortive as those employed by his father ; and an army was at length sent against them under Macarius, who having defeated them in a general engagement, banished Donatus and the heads of the party, exercising against the rest the most dreadful severities of a military judicature.

Some of the most celebrated of the fathers considered that they were performing an act of the highest piety by writing against this sect ; and it would have been well for the credit of the orthodox rulers of those times had they left the cause to the pious zeal and learning of those excellent men. After all that was done by the victorious officer of Constans, and by the laws which were passed in subsequent years, it was to the powerful eloquence of Optatus and St. Augustine that their defeat and suppression were mainly owing.* The former of these distinguished writers was bishop of Milevi in Africa ; and his work on the schism of the Donatists is elegantly and even powerfully written. According to this author, the persons whom they accused of delivering the Scriptures to the persecutors were altogether innocent of that crime, and he boldly retorts the accusation upon the accusers. In answer to Parmenianus, a Donatist, to whom the work is addressed, and who had strongly reprehended the orthodox for the persecutions of which they had been guilty, he observes, that the church had never persecuted them, and that they could name no member of the church that had done so. On the contrary, the Donatists, he says, had committed the most disgraceful excesses against the orthodox, had driven away bishops from their churches, murdered deacons while officiating at the altars, exercised cruelties of every kind against women and children, nor even forbore to treat the most sacred of things with despise. “Your bishops,” says he, “caused the eucharist to be thrown to the dogs, and presently the tokens of God’s anger were seen, for

* Optatus de Schism. Donatist.

the enraged animals turned upon their masters, and tore them as if they were thieves whom they knew not ; the justice of God thus employing their teeth to revenge the sacrilege." With regard to the persecution commenced by Macarius, he observes, that that officer was obliged to employ rigorous measures to quell the sedition, and again asserts that the church itself had no share in instigating such proceedings, which she neither desired to have pursued, nor was aware of when commenced. The bishop, however, notwithstanding these repeated assertions respecting the innocence of the orthodox, renders his own opinions on the subject of persecution somewhat doubtful, by suggesting that the attack on the schismatics was authorised by the example of Moses, who put 3000 men to death for worshipping the golden calf ; and boldly contending, that when Christ told St. Peter to put up his sword, he only intended the command to be understood of that particular time and circumstance ! Then repeating the accusations he had already brought against them, he exclaims, " Ye have redoubled your sacrilege, in breaking the chalices which held the blood of Christ ; ye have melted them down to make ingots of gold or silver, which ye have sold in the markets to every one indifferently who would buy them ! Sacrilegious as ye are, ye have not even respected the chalices in which you have yourselves offered, and they have been bought, it is probable, by infamous women for their own use ! Or the pagans, perhaps, have taken them for vessels to be employed in the service of idols. O fearful crime ! O unheard-of impiety !" *

The origin of the disgraceful excesses to which Optatus thus alludes, was the same as that of the opposition made by the Donatists to the election of the obnoxious bishop. They argued, that as that individual had disgraced himself by apostasy, the altar would be defiled by his presence ; and when they had driven their opponents from the churches, they pre-

* De Schism. Donatist. Tellemont, t. v.

tended, and many of them deceived by a blind fanaticism doubtless believed, that the vessels which had been used by these desecrated priests had suffered contamination from their touch, and ought no longer to be employed in the service of God. The absurdity of their ideas on these points is of course sufficiently evident ; but there is every reason to believe that it was thus they justified their conduct, and that we are, therefore, to regard the accusations brought against them, of an unprovoked and flagitious sacrilege, with some degree of modification.

But in the year 411 Augustine succeeded in persuading the chiefs of the Donatists to meet the representatives of the church in a conference at Carthage. The eloquence with which he there encountered the most accomplished of the party, and the strong and lucid arguments he opposed to the reasons on which they established their schism, convinced many of the least obstinate of their errors. Others whom his arguments would not, perhaps, have sufficiently affected, were deeply moved by the mildness and charity with which he propounded his sentiments. He had agreed, at the opening of the debate, and had induced the other bishops to join with him in the promise, that if they could not convict the Donatists of error, and prove their separation from the church unreasonable, they would resign their bishoprics into their hands, and be content to retire into the situation of private persons. All he said was in conformity with this assurance. “ If they speak injuriously of you,” was his advice to the orthodox, “ suffer it to be so, and answer not. Speak not to him who maltreats you, but speak much to God in his favour. Say meekly to him who attacks and injures you, ‘ Whatever you speak or do against me, I notwithstanding love you, because you are my brother ! ’ ”*

But the influence which Augustine exercised over the assembly by these means was not sufficient to prevent the debates from being continued with warmth for

* Tillemont, art. Augustine. Dupin, the same.

three days ; nor did he succeed in convincing the heads of the party that their schism was unlawful or unreasonable. The conviction, however, which his arguments failed to convey to the minds of the Donatists rushed with full force upon the understandings of those who agreed with the eloquent orator ; and when, at the conclusion of the conference, it was to be decided on which party lay the guilt of the schism, the tribune Marcellinus, who presided at the meeting, passed a sentence against the Donatists, which doomed them to exile or apostasy. Crowds of them, it is said, purchased their safety by immediately assenting to the decree of the tribune, or the persuasions of Augustine. Those who persevered in their opposition appealed to the emperor ; but he rejected their application, and not only confirmed the sentence of his minister, but directed the revival of the laws which had been anciently in force against them. This had no other effect than that of confirming the most dangerous part of the sect in their fanaticism and licentiousness. The Circumcelliones continued their horrible violences, with the fury of men inspired by despair as well as the most deplorable superstition ; and the orthodox, while thus exposed to the daggers of these wretched enthusiasts, every where rejoiced at the spectacle of hundreds of their less guilty opponents sinking under the infliction of ruinous fines, preparing for banishment, or perishing, as was often the case, by the hand of the public executioner.

It was at this period of the conflict, thus fiercely carried on between the two parties, that the Donatists began to exhibit instances of wilder enthusiasm and contempt of suffering than had as yet been displayed by any of the Christian sectaries. Despising the power which was sufficient to crush them, they resolved upon depriving their enemies of the glory of a triumph, and affected to rejoice that they were deemed worthy of undergoing death in vindication of their faith. To such a height of madness did this idea carry them, that when they might have escaped without difficulty,

they voluntarily exposed themselves to their persecutors; and when those whom they thus dared pitied their fanaticism, and refused them the desired martyrdom, they either destroyed themselves, or, which was equivalent, placed their adversaries in a position which rendered forbearance impossible. The following is one of the anecdotes related of their conduct in this respect:—A party of the most impatient of these deluded beings having sought in vain for some means of terminating their existence with honour, met, in the course of their wanderings, with a young man, a member of the orthodox church, whom they resolved to sacrifice to their hatred of his sect. Some of them, however, conceived an idea that this act of barbarity would be less becoming their zeal than their suffering a similar piece of cruelty to be perpetrated on themselves. This notion was immediately embraced by the whole party, and they signified to the young man, that they would allow him to remain uninjured, if he would agree to put them to death. To this strange proposition the young churchman signified his assent; but he demanded, with great appearance of reason, that they should consent to be bound before he commenced the slaughter, for, unless they put themselves out of the power of injuring him, he argued, they would probably no sooner feel the smart of their wounds than their agreement would be forgotten, and he made a victim of their still greater cruelty. There was so much fairness and plausibility in this request, that the Donatists readily consented to be bound hand and foot, and in that condition they awaited the stroke which was to place them among the worthiest of the saints. But instead of affording them the expected gratification, the young man first broke the swords they had placed in his hands, and then beat them as a punishment for their folly. The firm manner in which he had bound their hands and feet prevented them from resisting his blows, and they were afterwards left rolling in the road, to endure the abuse and mockery of whoever passed by.

It was not, however, to such mad and ignorant enthusiasts as these appear to have been, that the custom of self-murder, the most remarkable characteristic of the sect, was confined. According to the usual accounts given of this people, those who pretended to offer any apology for their conduct defended it by asserting, that they preferred dying to running the risk of being obliged to communicate in any manner with their adversaries. Others seem to have considered, that by destroying themselves when the pursuit was hot against them, they should terrify the orthodox from continuing the persecution, and by that means save their brethren and their faith. It was to this notion Augustine appears to have referred, when, in writing to count Boniface on the subject of the numerous conversions that had occurred, he says, "When you see how many have been saved from perdition, by being delivered from this miserable schism, you will acknowledge that it would have been great cruelty to abandon so many persons to eternal damnation and to the flames of hell, for fear that a band of desperadoes, so few in number compared with these, should voluntarily commit themselves to the flames which they had prepared for their own destruction." Among the works of this celebrated father are two books addressed to Gaudentius, the Donatist bishop of a city in Numidia, and one of those who had been commissioned by the sect to defend their rights in the conference at Carthage. The history of the bishop's fate is very imperfect; but from the incidental notices of it in the epistles addressed to him on the subject of his heresy, it appears, that having fled from his diocese, in order to avoid the fury of the persecution, he was soon after induced, from some compunctions of conscience, to return. He had no sooner re-established himself in his church than he made it known, that if any attempt was used to compel him to communicate with the Catholics, he would immediately set fire to his cathedral, and perish, with his faithful followers, under its ruins. The officer to whom Honorius had intrusted the exe-

cution of his laws against the Donatists was Dulcitius, a man whose disposition inclined him to tolerance, and who so far overstepped the usual maxims of his profession, as to write to Gaudentius, and persuade him, with great earnestness, to re-unite himself to the church, or at least not to commit the dreadful crime of destroying himself, and the unfortunate people that were with him. He next asked him, how he could find it in his heart to resolve upon burning the beautiful edifice in which he had so often called upon the name of God? or how he could deem it consistent with reason to burn himself, if he believed that he was innocent, instead of seeking his safety in flight, as Jesus Christ had directed his disciples to do of old?

To this epistle Gaudentius instantly replied, that he was resolved, if any violence were employed against him, to finish his days in the camp of the Lord; but that, as for those who were with him, he was so far from wishing to constrain them, that he had exhorted all who were under the influence of fear to depart and save themselves. The next day he wrote another letter, in which he defended his conduct more at length, and cited the example of Razias, whose death is recorded in the second book of Maccabees, in proof of the propriety of his proceedings. Dulcitius, unable to combat these arguments, sent both the epistles to Augustine, with an earnest request that he would answer them, and give him instructions as to the method it would be right to pursue with the heretics. The father replied, that the fear of suffering some few miserable creatures to perish ought not to prevent his employing the most rigorous measures for the salvation of others. He afterwards wrote a formal answer to the arguments of the Donatist, who again defended himself as before; but history has left it doubtful whether he perished by his own hand, as he threatened, or consented to avoid the persecutions of his enemies by a voluntary exile. The former is not at all improbable, considering the disposition to suicide which prevailed so generally among the sect, and that it is

known that several bishops and others of the clergy put themselves to a violent death. Mention is made by St. Augustine, in one of his epistles, of a presbyter named Donatus, who, in order to escape from his pursuers, leaped into a well, with the intention of destroying himself, but the persons who were following him coming up soon after, he was dragged out; and the father employs this instance of care and humanity on the part of the orthodox, to prove how sincere they were in their anxiety for the spiritual good of the heretics. Partial, indeed, as are the accounts of this famous controversy, and allowing that many of the assertions respecting the fury of the Donatists are somewhat exaggerated by the historians of the opposite side, there appears to be every reason for believing that considerable forbearance was exercised towards them by the public authorities, and that they were guilty of excesses which could only have proceeded from men under the influence of the worst species of fanaticism. Optatus, whose work, it should be remembered, was addressed to one of the party, accuses it of being chiefly characterised by a spirit of untameable ferocity. "Those," he says, "who are seduced, either by faction or subtilty, to join the sect, whether they be men or women, are suddenly converted from sheep into wolves—from faithful into perfidious—from patient into mad—from pacific into litigious—from simple into artful—from modest into shameless—from gentle into fierce—from innocent into artificers of evil." The unmerciful means which they every where employed to resent the injuries they had suffered from the orthodox, tend greatly to prove the truth of these allegations. Never did the Christian church endure, perhaps, so many evils from the intrusion of a sectarian spirit as during the existence of the Donatist heresy; and, to add to the ignominy with which the memory of that people has been handed down to posterity, they are believed, and with good reason, to have shared in exciting one of the most bloody persecutions that was ever experienced by a Christian people.

The province of Africa having fallen into the hands of the Vandals, Genseric their king, and after him Huneric his son, pursued the Catholics with a wanton barbarity, which the Arians, Donatists, and other sectarians, appear to have employed every means to influence. One of the earliest laws of Huneric was, that no person should enjoy any public function who did not profess himself an Arian ; and crowds were soon after sent into exile, or thrown into unhealthy prisons, in which they died of the fevers generated by the condition of their miserable cells. When a conference was proposed, but broken off by the Arians, the unfortunate clergymen, who were to have advocated the cause of the orthodox, were severally condemned to receive a certain number of blows with a wand, and then to be sent into exile. Eugenius, the bishop of Carthage, was one of those who were thus treated ; and in his banishment he is said to have employed himself continually in writing letters to his flock, or in the performance of the most rigid acts of devotion, to obtain divine pardon for the sins to the commission of which he attributed the present calamities. But if we may give credit to the earliest accounts of this persecution, exile was the mildest species of punishment employed by the Vandal monarch, and his Arian or Donatist advisers, against the orthodox. The catalogue of sufferings recorded by the bishop of Utica, in his narrative of these events, presents us with the same frightful spectacles as those described in the pagan persecutions, except that we may more than once discover the signs of that bitter hatred which is scarcely to be found but among warring sectarians. To prevent their saving themselves by flight, the persecutors exercised the same vigilance against the orthodox as if they had been an invading army : not a fruit-tree, it is said, was allowed to remain where it was thought they might seek refuge ; and every monastery and house of prayer which might have given them shelter was burnt to the ground. Of those who were seized, the most venerable almost uniformly experienced the worst treatment, the

fury of barbarous pursuers seeming to gather fresh nourishment from the dignity of those they tormented. Among the favourite methods of manifesting their rage, was that of compelling their victims to drink sea-water, or other nauseous liquids, till they were on the point of suffocation,—a species of torture which, some centuries after, obtained great favour with the venerable fathers of the Inquisition. At other times, they forced their prisoners to bear burdens which camels or horses would have almost found oppressive ; and when these contrivances were deemed insufficient to punish their unfortunate adversaries, they applied sharp instruments to different parts of their bodies, in order to make them move under the burdens which they were wholly unable to support. These methods were pursued indiscriminately with young and old, and every feeling of nature was outraged and forgotten.

Our chief reason for mentioning these circumstances is to show that the principles in which persecution has its birth cannot fairly be attributed to the orthodox exclusively, any more than that the latter can lay claim exclusively to the honour of suffering patiently in the defence of their faith. There were martyrs and persecutors on both sides ; and the more closely we examine the records of ecclesiastical history the more convinced we shall be that religion, when it is not received in its purity, or when it does not produce the natural effects to be looked for from such an agent, is like a powerful medicine mixed up with the evil humours of a bad constitution, which it either altogether expels, or quickens into more fatal activity.

The struggles between the other sects and the orthodox would, there is little reason to doubt, lead to the same conclusion as that drawn from the Donatist controversy, were the particulars of those contests better known. Laws of the severest kind were passed against the Manichees ; but as that celebrated sect continued to exist for several centuries, many of its members must have encountered dangers and endured hardships in

retaining their faith of no slight description. The same was the case with the Apollinarii, and other sects ; but it was the Priscillianists against whom the sword of persecution was first drawn, at the direct instigation of a Christian bishop, and at a time when no such dangers threatened the church as might be supposed to exist during the reign of the Arians and Donatists. This sect, which professed some opinions similar to those of the ancient Gnostics, had been introduced into Spain by a learned layman, named Priscillian, who afterwards received orders, and was made bishop of Abila. His doctrines, however, becoming suspected, a decree of banishment was obtained against him by the neighbouring clergy, and he was expelled his diocese. But the virulence of his opponents having somewhat subsided, he was recalled, and resumed the exercise of his functions, till at length, in the year 384, fresh accusations were brought against him, and he was condemned to death. The principal actor in this affair was Ithacius, bishop of Sossuba, a man who is described, even by the enemies of Priscillian, as audacious, talkative, impudent, luxurious, and a slave to his belly ; a character which might be applied, without error, to many other persecutors beside himself.

The names of many of the most celebrated fathers of the church have been mentioned in the preceding narrative. To the great men whose labours we there alluded to at length may be added Irenæus and Tertullian. The former perished in the persecution of Lyons, to the bishopric of which he succeeded on the martyrdom of Pothinus. Little remains of his works ; but from the treatise on heresies much valuable information has been gleaned respecting the divisions which existed in his age. Tertullian was a native of Africa, and held the rank of presbyter, but whether in the church, or among the Montanists, is a matter of controversy. He joined that party with great ardour, and wrote strongly in its defence. His works, therefore, are in the latter division of them tinged with enthusiasm, but they abound

in eloquent displays of Christian truth, and have ever formed a noble barrier against the petulant arguments of ignorance and prejudice. But the period which has just been described might almost be termed the golden age of ecclesiastical literature. Lactantius, Athanasius, Ambrose, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Epiphanius, and the numerous writers who were either enlisted under their banners, or stood opposed to them in the struggles of controversy, treated in this century of every doctrine into which Christianity can be supposed to branch. In many of their works we find an eloquence as bold and nervous as the faith which inspired it was sincere. The faults which occasionally disfigure it are those common to most writers in a declining age of literature ; while the mixture of exaggerated traditions with sound truths, of speculations in the dark regions of spiritual metaphysics, and fierce anathemas against opponents, may be traced to the circumstances in which they were placed, and to the influence of which they were made more especially susceptible by their sincerity, their earnestness, and entire abstraction from every care foreign to their purpose. Of Athanasius the character has been already given. His voluminous writings embody the opinions which he so long laboured to establish ; and are not only a grand depository of doctrinal expositions, but abound in pure, practical lessons of Christian virtue, the result of meditations such as few minds could pursue so steadily, and of an experience such as still fewer have been taught by.

It is related of Ambrose, that, while sleeping in his cradle, a swarm of bees settled on his lips, and then winged their way towards heaven. From this circumstance his father is said to have predicted his future greatness and ability. His works display neither the power nor the erudition of some of the other fathers : but they are not deficient in eloquence ; and, while the historian may gather from parts of them very useful information on the state of manners at the period, the general reader will find, in other portions of them, the most

admirable instruction on the great duties of a Christian. His principal productions, under the former head, are his numerous letters, his Treatises on Penance and Virginity, and the Book of Mysteries or Sacraments. Under the latter, his chief work is the Book of Offices, to which may be added numerous expositions of the Psalms and other portions of Scripture, in the form of homilies or sermons. As a theologian or a scholar, Ambrose was not much regarded by the great men of his age. Jerome describes his Treatise on the Holy Ghost as a production in which there is nothing logical, nothing masculine, nothing moving, nothing convincing; as in every respect feeble and languid; but polished, dressed up, and painted with strange colours. It may be conjectured, that the public and courtly life which Ambrose led from his youth had deprived him of many of those advantages which gave such power and depth to the style of some of his contemporaries. But his piety was warm and genuine; his faith was uncorrupted by the inventions of the age; and he was not left altogether without experience of the fortitude necessary to the support of truth against the aggressions of the world, or its authorities. The polished and florid character of his style, consequently, is not destructive of the better graces of sedate and pious thought; and Ambrose well merits the place which was early assigned him among the ornaments of the Christian church.*

Basil was a native of Cappadocia, and studied, while a youth, at Cæsarea, in Palestine; at Constantinople, under the orator Libanius; and then, in the still celebrated schools of Athens. Having thus imbued his mind with general learning, he passed into Egypt and Libya, where the piety and tranquil life of the monks, settled in the deserts of those countries, so impressed his imagination, that he soon after embraced asceticism himself, and is said to have been the first to establish a monastic order in Pontus and Cappadocia. His purity

* Cave, Hist. Lit. Dupin, Bibliot. Pat. Socrat. Hist. Eccles.

of life, and reputation for learning, led to his being promoted, on the death of Eusebius, bishop of Cæsarea, to the vacant diocese; in which dignity he stood exposed to the fury of the Arian emperor Valens, and bore a full share of the troubles which so long afflicted the orthodox. In the course of his labours he held communication with the most celebrated men of the various parties into which the church was divided, and exercised considerable power in tempering the passions of some, and rebuking the vices of others. His works consist of a vast body of letters on almost every branch of Christian doctrine and church discipline; of commentaries on various branches of Scripture; and discourses or homilies. He is considered to have explained the mystery of the Trinity in a manner the most incontrovertible; and to have laboured more than all the early theologians to determine the distinction of the three hypostases in the Godhead, and to prove that *person* and *hypostasis* are the same. Of his letters Dupin says*,—"that they are written with inimitable purity, majesty, and eloquence: that there may be found in them all the history of the time, described to the life; the different characters of men's tempers, the contrary interests of each party, the motives which actuated both sides, and the intrigues they made use of for carrying on their designs: that they contain, moreover, a forcible and lively description of the eastern and western churches; of discussions on doctrine concluded with the utmost learning and prudence; and number among them some full of pathetic, consolatory exhortations, and some full of wit and ingenious compliments." Letters so various, and so eloquently written, are an invaluable treasure to the church, and may safely be appealed to in proof of many points respecting both doctrine and discipline now but weakly understood or supported.

Gregory Nazianzen was, in youth, the fellow-student, and, through life, the intimate associate of Basil. His father, who was bishop of Nazianzen, having fallen

* Bibliot. Pat. cent. iv. art. Basil. Cave, Hist. Lit.

under suspicion of heresy, owed the restoration of peace in his diocese to the judicious efforts of Gregory. Basil, on his elevation to the bishopric of Cæsarea, consecrated him bishop of Sasima, a small town, situated in a most unhealthy district, and the inhabitants of which were rude and ignorant. He is said to have received this appointment with no friendly feelings, and to have left it in disgust.* After this he returned to Nazianzen, where he continued to assist his father in the duties of the diocese. At the death of the latter he repaired to Constantinople, and established himself in the church of Anastasia, where he continued to preach against the Arians, who then ruled in the city, till he was appointed to the bishopric itself; which he resigned, as has been related, in consequence of a dispute respecting the appointment of Flavian to the see of Antioch. The style of this father is energetic and eloquent; exhibiting many of the higher graces of oratory, and well calculated to effect the purposes which the bold opposer of infidelity and heresy in high places would have in view. This appears, especially, in his orations against the emperors Constantius and Julian, and in his panegyric on some of the admirable men who adorned his age.†

Epiphanius, who was a native of Palestine, and bishop of the Isle of Cyprus, was very inferior in ability to the distinguished writers above named. But his works, though deficient in just argument, and containing statements not always to be depended upon, are valuable as exhibiting the general state of opinions and parties at the time when he wrote. The Treatise on Heresies is his principal production, and is divided into three parts. In the first he gives an account of the heresies which existed before Christ, and amounted, according to his statement, to forty-six; in the next he describes twenty-three of a later date; and in the third book eleven.

* Cave, Hist. Lit. Dupin. The former writer says that he never visited this diocese. Surely even from this we may discover that the apostolic spirit was already departed from many Christian ministers,

† Cave, Hist. Lit.

Lactantius wrote in the earlier part of this century, and is generally considered to have been the most eloquent of the Latin fathers. He sacrificed, however, his power as a reasoner to his art as an orator; and while rivalling Cicero in the graces of his style, continually missed his aim in arguing with his opponents. But his character did honour to the church to which he belonged. Though tutor to the son of Constantine, he is said to have lived in extreme poverty; and seems to have preserved not only his integrity, but his Christian simplicity, in the midst of a luxurious court.

Numerous other writers might be named as exercising the powers of learning and genius in the illustration or defence of Christian doctrine at this period. Eusebius the historian, Theodorus, Optatus, Evagrius, and Hilary, were all men of conspicuous talent and influence; and their works, with those of the more eminent writers above mentioned, confirm the opinion we have stated, that the fourth century may, on the whole, be considered the golden age of ancient theological literature.

The state of doctrine in this age may be gathered from what has been related respecting the great controversies then agitated. In regard to discipline it appears, that the enlargement of the church, together with the increase of its wealth, and of the power of its ministers, had rendered many additions necessary to the few ordinances by which it had been originally governed. Metropolitan bishops were now appointed.* Provincial synods were held twice a year. Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople, were allowed to enjoy a pre-eminence of dignity above all other dioceses, and to exercise supreme authority over their respective districts. The greatest caution, however, appears to have been used to prevent the undue encroachments of episcopal power. A bishop could decide on no point of importance without the consent of his clergy: all questions of difficulty were to be referred to the synods. With the regulations of the system of government were made

* Bingham, *Antiq. Eccles.* Dupin, *Bibliot. Pat.* Fleury.

many far less useful additions to the rites and ceremonies of the church. Baptism was performed with more formality. The sacrament of the Lord's supper lost its simplicity amid a host of observances, which could by no means increase its solemn power as a purely spiritual rite. Marriages and funerals were performed with new pomp. Prayers for the dead, processions, the invocation of saints and martyrs, the use of the cross, with all its attendant formalities, and the decoration of the churches with the most splendid works of human ingenuity, were introduced at the same period, and contributed, with the heresy of some, and the ambition of others, to proclaim to the world, that men need no longer be ashamed of the gospel of Christ from the opposition of its professors to secular pride and pomp.

CHAP. VII.

ASCETICISM AND MONACHISM. — ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF THE SYSTEMS. — ACCOUNT OF SAINT ANTHONY. — SIMEON STYLITES AND OTHER CELEBRATED ANCHORITES. — THEIR INFLUENCE.

As a fit corollary to the preceding chapters, we may now turn our attention to that singular class of men, who, fleeing from the dangers of the world, and the furious strife of parties, passed their lives in solitude, inflicting on themselves a series of sufferings, which, though less acute than those which many had endured at the hands of executioners, exceeded them as trials of patience and perseverance. No class of errors is so numerous as that which consists of mistakes resulting from men's confounding the means of attaining holiness with the attainment itself; and, in the case of a religion like Christianity, it is not at all wonderful that this should have

occurred in the earliest period. The promises which the gospel holds out are great, and appeal strongly to the first desires of our nature: but the holiness by which they are to be secured seems to weak humanity a heavy price; and a single error in the doctrinal consideration of the subject produces, according to the character of the individual believer, either a desire to obtain a meritorious possession of the prize, despair as to ever reaching the requisite degree of sanctity, or a total indifference on the subject, involved, as it appears, in such a cloud of discouraging circumstances. A little enquiry into the history of any religion will show, we think, that its professors speedily become divided into two classes, those, namely, who conscientiously, and those who only formally adhere to it; and if the subject be examined somewhat farther, it will also be seen, that if errors be introduced into the system, it is to the devout and conscientious that the introduction of practical superstition is attributable, while errors in point of doctrine may be more frequently traced to men of very inferior piety. The former will be found suffering under perpetual anxiety, from a fear lest they should never do enough to obtain the promised reward; the latter will refine upon the doctrines of their faith, till they can convince themselves that to comprehend and believe form the sum total of religion. The existence, consequently, of such men as the anchorites of old, was a necessary effect of the confusion which began to prevail as early as the third century, respecting the nature of religious perfection.* Asceticism springs naturally from an overstrained view of Christian self-denial, and traces of it may be discovered in the first defection of believers from the plain precepts of spiritual truth applied to human nature, seeking perfection by action. But monachism was a distinct institution; and though many ascetics are to be found in the church before that period,

* Monks and ascetics were, at a very early period, divided into several classes: thus there were the Eremites, who lived in perfect solitude; the Cenobites, who formed societies; the Anchorites, the stricter class of Eremites; and the Sarabaites, who travelled about selling relics.

there are said to have been no monks till the middle of the third century. At first the monks adhered strictly to the mode of life signified by their appellation, and dwelt in perfect solitude; but at length St. Pachomius instituted societies, and erected monasteries in Egypt. From thence the principles of the monastic life were carried into Syria, Armenia, Pontus, and other provinces, and about the middle of the fourth century were established in Italy by St. Athanasius.*

The honour of being the first on the list of Christian hermits belongs to Paul of Thebaïs, as mentioned in a preceding chapter. For more than ninety years that celebrated saint lived among the caves, which had formed, some ages before, the dwellings of Egyptian money coiners. The one which he chose for his more constant residence was sheltered by a noble palm tree; and near it sprung a little rivulet of pure water, the lonely inhabitant of the cave being thus supplied by the fruit of the one and the constant flowing of the latter with all that he required to furnish his table.† But though Paul of Thebaïs was the first who devoted himself to an ascetic life, St. Anthony commenced the same mode of living at so nearly the same time, that he considered himself the oldest hermit in the world, till a dream rendered him suspicious as to the justice of his claim. The story respecting his visiting Paul in the desert, of his seeing his soul carried up to heaven by angels, and of two lions coming out of the wood, and tearing up the ground with their claws, to save him the trouble of digging the saint's grave, are a tissue of absurdities which will not bear repetition, but indicate the early veneration for ascetic piety.

If St. Anthony, however, cannot claim priority among the hermits, he enjoys the title of patriarch of monks. He was born at Coma, in Upper Egypt, about the year 251, and was remarkable from childhood for gentleness of disposition.‡ Shortly before he reached his twentieth

* Cave, Hist. Lit. art. Pachomius. Baronius, An. Eccles.

† Theodoret*i* Vitæ Sanct. Pat. Tillemont, Mém. Eccles.

‡ Athanasius.

year, his parents died, and left him in possession of a considerable fortune ; but hearing a few months after that passage in the gospel, in which Christ says to the rich young man, “ Sell all thou hast, and give it to the poor,” he immediately disposed of his estate, reserving only so much as would pay the taxes to which he was liable, and maintain himself and his sister in the homeliest way of life. It happened, however, that he not long after heard in the gospel, “ Be not careful for the morrow ;” and applying this, as he did the former passage, he distributed the remainder of his property among the poor, and placed his sister in some establishment which it is supposed bore a resemblance to our modern nunneries. He then retired to a lonely spot in the neighbourhood of Coma, and commenced a most rigid course of life ; but for some time was assailed with strong temptations ; and though his only food was bread, taken at long intervals, and his couch the bare floor, he found it necessary to seek a more gloomy solitude, to escape the attacks of Satan. An old dilapidated tomb attracted his steps, and, badly sheltered by its crumbling walls, he prepared himself for the renewed attacks of his enemy. After suffering severely in the conflict, he was victorious ; and having in a few years acquired great perfection in piety, he sought a more remote solitude than that which he had hitherto inhabited, and passed the next twenty years of his life in an ancient and ruinous castle which he discovered among the mountains. The only human being with whom he had any intercourse, except by some rare accident, was a man who conveyed bread to him ; but the visits of this person were limited to once in six months, and could scarcely break the continuity of the saint’s solitude more than the flight of a bird across the desert.

But the extraordinary virtue and devotion which he thus exercised could not remain concealed in an age when men were eagerly looking for such examples of ascetic piety. He was, therefore, earnestly besought to

found a monastery, in which others might follow the rules by which he had attained to such perfection. He at last yielded to the wishes of his admirers, and a number of little cells were accordingly constructed in a spot chosen for the purpose. Not, however, to lose the enjoyment of perfect solitude, he now began to make long journeys across the deserts, and visited several remote provinces, employing the time which he spent among his disciples almost in the same manner that he did in retirement; but relieving himself from an inclination to melancholy, the result of having left his mountain solitude, by hard labour in his garden.

Though he had thus in some measure modified his mode of life as a recluse, he pursued the same rules of strict abstinence as in his former habitation. His daily nourishment was limited to six ounces of bread, moistened with water and a little salt. As a great indulgence, or rather when nature absolutely demanded it, he sometimes added a little oil, and at others a few dates to the bread; but to counterbalance this departure from his ordinary rules, he not unfrequently fasted entirely for three or four days together. His dress corresponded with the coarseness of his food, and consisted simply of a shirt of sackcloth, and a coat made of sheepskin, fastened round him by a leathern girdle. Nor did he allow himself to make up for these privations, or the fatigue he voluntarily endured during the day, by the long indulgence of rest. The greater part of the night was occupied by him in the interchange of prayer and meditation; and he is said to have made it his constant practice to rise at midnight, and continue on his knees in earnest supplication till sunrise, and often till it set the next day.*

In this manner did the celebrated father of the monastic orders live till he was 105 years old, when he died, to the great sorrow of his disciples, and of the Christian world in general. Amid all the fables in which the histories of his life abound, it is not difficult

* Theodoretus, *Vitæ Pat.* Athanasius, *Vit. Ant. Oper.* vol. ii.

to discover that St. Anthony embraced a solitary life from the purest motives ; that he has been rarely exceeded in the strictness of his asceticism ; and that, though thoroughly imbued with the mistaken notions respecting Christian perfection which were beginning to gain ground, he possessed and exercised as many virtues as his situation allowed him to exhibit. Several of his sayings which have been handed down to us exhibit him also as a man of no mean intellectual endowments ; though it is generally allowed that his education had been extremely limited. Thus, in answer to those who treated him with contempt, on account of his want of learning, he asked them which was the more important, reason or learning, and to which the origin of the other was to be ascribed ? On the haughty disputants replying, that of course reason had the precedence, he observed, “ Then reason suffices me.” To other persons of the same kind, who expressed their wonder that he could live in solitude without books, he replied that he found in the great book of nature enough to supply the want of any others. With a wisdom still less doubtful, he said to his monks, when they expressed their astonishment at his being so much regarded by the emperor Constantine as to have a letter sent him from that monarch and his sons, “ Be not surprised that the emperor writes to us, one man to another, wonder rather that God should have written to us, and that he should have spoken to us by his Son !”

That he was well acquainted with human nature, notwithstanding his secluded mode of life, is shown by the opinions imputed to him respecting the future fate of monastic institutions. On hearing some of his followers express their surprise at the number of persons who became ascetics, he observed, with tears, that the time would come when monks would be fond of living in cities and stately buildings, and of eating at dainty tables, while their only distinction from people of the world would consist in the difference of their dress. Equally excellent was the example which he set in his death.

Perceiving that a superstitious reverence was given to the remains of those who had been esteemed during life for their holiness, he refused the most urgent solicitations of his monks to remain among them when he found himself near his end. Taking with him, therefore, the only two of his disciples whom he permitted to reside near his cell on the mountain, he prepared himself for death, and disposed of all his earthly possessions, by ordering one of his sheepskins, with his cloak, to be given to Athanasius, to testify, it is said, his entire agreement with that celebrated prelate in matters of faith ; while the other sheepskin he directed his disciples to give to the bishop Serapion ; and, for their own merits and tried fidelity, desired them to keep his sackcloth for themselves.

From all that is known respecting St. Anthony, it is easy to discover that the system of asceticism, though securely established, was as yet in its first stage ; and that it had not yet blinded its professors to that golden maxim of true religion, — that mercy is better than sacrifice ; that charity, which is always essential, must not yield to what is only sometimes expedient. St. Anthony repeatedly discoursed on this theme to his monks ; and, by cultivating a little garden with his own hands, that he might always have refreshing herbs ready for the traveller, he preached a sermon which went far towards preventing the ill effects of his system, and giving to it all the beneficial influences of which it was ever capable.

But almost immediately after the death of this remarkable man, the self-denial and austerity which he practised were imitated in a manner which was equally contrary to the dictates of plain reason and the elevating principles of Christianity. As a contrast to the character and asceticism of St. Anthony, we may mention those of the far-famed Simeon Stylites, who, strange to say, obtained by his extravagances the title of Saint, and the veneration of all Christendom, for more than 1000 years. This great hero in the ranks of auto-

martyrs, — if we may so term the men who sacrificed their existence to suffering, — was a native of Cilicia, and the son of a poor peasant, whose whole property consisted of a small flock of sheep which Simeon was employed to attend in the fields. Happening, however, one day to hear the seven benedictions read, he felt so strong a desire to commence a life of devotion, that he hastened to enquire of some holy man in the neighbourhood how he might best obtain the necessary graces for that purpose. Soon after this he fell into a sleep, during which he saw a vision, which still further excited and warmed him in his purpose.

The fervour with which the youthful Simeon began his career gave certain augury of the eminence he was destined to obtain. Encouraged by the dream from which he had just awoke, he hastened to a neighbouring monastery*, at the gate of which he lay several days, without either eating or drinking, and only begging that he might be admitted to perform the meanest offices of the establishment. The pious earnestness with which so young a lad sought to devote himself to a religious life moved the abbot to admit him; and his humility and assiduity shortly raised him to the highest place in the good opinion of his superiors. After having completed his noviciate, and distinguished himself, at this early period of his life, by a rigid course of austerities, he removed to another monastery, where he exercised a still severer species of mortification. The monks were themselves remarkable for their severities, eating only one meal a day, and that not till the evening; but Simeon took only one meal a week! The abbot, however, either judging that this extreme fasting would destroy his health, or not wishing the reputation of the brotherhood to be endangered, by the comparison made between them and the new member, desired him to discontinue this mortification. The injunction was seemingly obeyed. But, instead of being placed in a better condition by the improvement he was necessitated

* Theodoretus, Vit. Pat.; Butler's Lives of the Saints; and Tillemont.

to make in his diet, he now resolved upon pursuing a course of secret penance more painful and dangerous than any he had yet attempted. Taking the rope which belonged to the buckets of the well, and which was made of twisted palm leaves, he bound it fast round his body next the skin, and there kept it till it worked into the flesh, and made a frightful wound, which soon defied concealment. It was three days before the surgeon could remove the rope from his body; and it was then only done by the infliction of wounds which threatened his immediate death. The abbot, esteeming conformity to his orders, and the regular discipline of the convent, more highly than such dangerous examples of penance, dismissed him, on his recovery, from the monastery.

Thus obliged to seek some retreat in which he might be able to practise his austerities without control, he repaired to a cell on Mount Thelamissa; and, as it was near the season of Lent, resolved to pass the whole forty days there in total abstinence. A neighbouring hermit named Bassus, the superior of 200 monks residing in the vicinity of the cell, left him ten loaves and some water; but on returning to see him at the end of Lent, he found the provisions untouched, and the holy penitent stretched on the earth, having, it appeared, fallen a martyr to his devotion. By the attention of Bassus, however, he was recovered; but so far was the danger he had incurred from preventing his following the same method of keeping the next Lent, that he continued this rigid mode of observing the forty days' fast through the remainder of his life. Time and custom, it is observed by Theodoretus, in his memoir of the saint, greatly lessened the labour; but neither the one nor the other could prevent, it seems, its natural effect upon his frame: for at the commencement of the fast he was accustomed to perform his devotions standing; but a little after, as he grew weaker, he was obliged to pray sitting; and at last he could only worship as he lay stretched out on his couch. When he pursued this custom of fasting on the column, from his

abode on which he received the appellation of Stylites, he was obliged, not deeming it lawful to come down, to bind himself with ropes and a heavy log of wood to the pillar ; but some time after, and when he had acquired greater ability to endure, he was able, it is said, to pass the forty days standing, and without any such support as that above mentioned.

At the end of three years he removed from the cell, in which he had taken up his abode on leaving the monastery, and built himself a habitation on the top of the mountain ; but, increasing his austerities at every remove, he refused to put any roof to his rude building, and thus lived exposed to all the changes of the atmosphere. Fearing that he might be tempted, by the infirmity of nature, to overstep the narrow boundaries of his circle, he procured an iron chain twenty cubits long, one end of which he fastened to a rock, and the other to his right leg. But Meletius, bishop of Antioch, wisely reprov'd him for employing this method for restraining the impulses of a rebellious will ; observing, that the mind was a far better help to virtuous resolutions than a chain of iron. Simeon saw the truth of the remark, and desired a smith to come and knock off the fetter from his leg ; but it was found to have eaten deep into the flesh, and he was again subjected to the most acute suffering.

These repeated instances of pious and heroic fortitude were at length made known through all the neighbouring district, and the fame of the holy hermit thence spread into countries more remote. The mountain on which he lived soon after became the resort of devout people from Persia, Armenia, and even Spain, Gaul, and Britain. At Rome his praises, it is said, were in every body's mouth ; images of him adorned the vestibules both of shops and palaces, and were regarded as a defence against almost every species of evil.

But Simeon had lost no part of his humility by the veneration shown him ; and the concourse of visitors who sought his benediction disturbed his prayers and

meditations. To escape, therefore, in some degree, the importunities of these intruders on his solitude, he had a column erected, on which he resolved thenceforth to pass his days. The height of this pillar was at first six cubits, then twelve, after that twenty-two; and when Theodoret wrote, it was thirty-six; "its inhabitant desiring," he says*, "to fly up to heaven, and be altogether free from the conversation of this earth." The reasons which the bishop alleges in favour of the mode of life which the subject of his memoir had chosen, are, that, strange as it might appear to the profane and thoughtless, the penance to which Simeon subjected himself was not more remarkable than those which had been undergone by the saints of old, at the express command of God. "Thus Isaiah," he says, "was ordered to walk with naked feet; and Jeremiah to place a collar and a chain about his neck. Hosea received directions to submit to a still more repulsive species of penance; and Ezekiel was ordered to lie 40 days on his right side, and 150 on his left side, to dig through a wall, and go forth as a fugitive. The astonishment which was excited by the conduct of these holy men attracted attention, it is argued, to their communications; and, in the same manner, Simeon, on his column, was as a bright beacon on a mountain to the most distant people. Coming to him, the heathen of various provinces renounced their idolatrous practices and embraced Christianity, retiring from the mountain praising the name of the true God."

The reports which were thus circulated through the whole Christian world respecting his extraordinary piety so greatly astonished some persons, that they began to doubt whether he were really a human being. A venerable old man of Arebena, to satisfy himself on this point, made a journey to the pillar; and addressing the hermit, besought him to declare whether he were a man or an incorporeal nature. The crowd who were pre-

* See his life of this recluse, which, abounding as it does in extravagances, is intermingled with many interesting remarks.

sent sharply commanded him to be silent, but Simeon desired him to say why he put the question: "because," replied the old man, "I am told that you neither eat nor sleep; and it is well known that no one who is properly a human being can exist without eating or sleeping." The hermit, in answer to this remark, directed the interrogator to come up the pillar; and on being obeyed, he not only made him touch his hands, but showed him, to his astonishment and horror, one of his feet nearly destroyed by sores; — a clear proof, it was understood, that he was really a being composed of flesh and blood.*

In order to afford mankind all the advantage possible from the example of his extraordinary piety, he never refused, on festival days, to appear before the numerous persons who flocked to the mountain. From one setting of the sun to another he might be seen standing with his hands stretched out towards heaven; neither fatigue nor the desire of sleep ever taking him from his devotions. His humility still continued the same, after he had attained this great eminence as a saint; and the poorest rustic or mechanic, it is said, was as sure of obtaining a kind and gentle answer to his enquiries as the noblest and most wealthy visiter.

Simeon lived in the practice of this astonishing penance till he was sixty-nine years of age, when he expired on the top of the pillar which had so long formed his abode. His influence, though his life was spent in constant confinement to a single spot, was very considerable in the church; and applications were made to him for advice, on more than one occasion, by the emperors during whose reigns he lived. Theodosius wrote a letter to him, much admired for its beauty, in which he earnestly entreated him to pray for the peace of the church, and to exhort those who could contribute to it to exert themselves to that end.† So much also

* Vitæ Pat. Simeon. Evagrius, Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. 13. The historian adds to the above an account of a beautiful temple subsequently raised round Simeon's column.

† Baronius, Annal. Eccles. an. 432. See pp. 49, 50.

was he respected by the empress Theodosia, that, at his persuasion, she forsook the heresy of Eutychius, and conformed to the opinions of the church. On all occasions, indeed, he proved himself a zealous friend to the orthodox party ; and his name is, on that account, perhaps, as well as on that of his devotion, handed down to us with the accumulated praises of successive historians.

St. Nile, the hermit of Sinai, passed a somewhat more adventurous life than Simeon Stylites. He was a native of Constantinople, and of a rank sufficiently high to place him in some of the most important offices of the state.* When he conceived the idea of devoting himself to a life of solitude, he had been some time married, and was the father of two children, whom he tenderly loved. They were still very young, when, taking them in his arms one day, he made known his intentions to his wife, informing her that he should take one of their infants with him, and leave the other with her. He added, at the same time, that it would be useless for her to complain or attempt to divert him from his purpose. As she was accustomed, it is said, to find him determined in his purposes, and saw by the expression of his countenance that it would be vain to resist him in his present resolution, she yielded assent ; and they separated with many tears. He then took the child, and proceeded to the solitudes of Mount Sinai. There he united himself to a society of ascetics, who inhabited the surrounding district, and passed their lives in little cells cut in the rocks, and distant from each other about a league. Before leaving home, he had divested himself of all his possessions ; and on arriving in the desert, where he intended to make his abode, had not wherewithal to obtain the meanest necessities of existence. It is generally supposed that the following story related of one of the hermits of Sinai refers to him ; but whether so or not, it serves to give no inaccurate idea of the misery to which some of the

* Tillemont, *Mém. Ecclés.* vol. xiv.

ascetics of that solitude reduced themselves. Joseph of Pelusium, during his stay on the mountain, happened one day to meet with a recluse who astonished him as much by the poverty of his appearance as by his devotion and eloquence. He afterwards saw the same person at the place where the hermits assembled for prayer on the Sabbath, and he was still clad in the same miserable manner. As his apparel was so different to that of his brethren, who were clad in neat white garments, Joseph was induced to enquire the reason, and was informed that he had no means of obtaining any better dress : on hearing which, he immediately led him to his cell, and bestowed on him a linen habit, and whatever else was necessary for his comfort. On another occasion, he was deputed, with nine others of the society, to present some address to the emperor ; but he earnestly requested his brethren to exempt him from the duty, alleging that he had been the slave of a great lord at the court, meaning the emperor himself, who would constrain him, if he returned, to resume his former station ;—so sweet was poverty, in comparison with the dependence and the exposure to temptation which he had suffered while in affluence and splendour.

But it was not by his superior austerity simply that St. Nile distinguished himself among the hermits of Sinai. The learning he had acquired in his youth, and the talents with which he was richly endowed by nature qualified him as an instructor of those among whom he lived ; and he was repeatedly applied to by the other hermits for advice in seasons of trouble or temptation. The same endowments also enabled him to combat many of the heretical opinions prevalent in his time ; and both the Arians and the Novatians felt the force of his polemical powers. When Chrysostom was banished from Constantinople, he warmly espoused the cause of that celebrated man ; and in his letter to the emperor Arcadius, who desired his prayers when the capital was threatened by an earthquake, he asked him how he could hope that any protection would be

afforded a city, which was the abode of so many crimes ; and in which justice had been so basely violated by the banishment of the holy bishop, — the pillar of the church, the light of truth, the trumpet of Jesus Christ ! “ How,” continued he, “ can you desire to employ my prayers for a city which God in his anger punishes with earthquakes and the lightnings of heaven, by which it hourly expects to be consumed, whilst my own heart is itself consumed by the fire of affliction, and my spirit agitated by a continual trembling, caused by the excesses committed within its walls ? ”

But the solitude of the hermits of Sinai was at length invaded by a band of Saracens, who, killing some and taking others captive, totally dispersed the little sacred community. St. Nile himself happened to be among the few who were allowed by the barbarians to escape to the top of the mountain. His son Theodulus, who was young and robust, remained a prisoner ; and the unfortunate father shortly after heard, from some one who escaped, that he was about to be offered in sacrifice to one of the deities worshipped by the Saracens. Instead, however, of being slain, he was sold for a slave ; and happening to fall into the hands of Hilarion, bishop of Elusium, he afforded so many proofs of his great piety, that the prelate ordained him, and made him his sacristan. St. Nile, after a long and painful journey, discovered the fate of Theodulus, and was himself ordained priest by Hilarion. Both the father and son, however, resolved upon returning to their solitude on Mount Sinai ; and they made a vow to exercise greater austerities than they had before practised, as a mark of their gratitude for the divine protection they had lately received.

Marcianus was another of these remarkable men. He was of a noble family, possessed a large fortune, and was endowed with the most attractive graces of person ; enjoying, in a word, all those advantages which best enable a man to win and retain the smiles of the world. But he was still a youth when he resolved upon pro-

tecting himself from the allurements to which his station exposed him, by retiring altogether from society ; and, with this determination, he sought the wildest part of the deserts, and there built himself a hermitage, but so small in its dimensions that it would not allow of his either lying at full length, or standing upright. In this retreat he passed his time in prayer and meditation, or in reading the Scriptures, his mind finding full occupation in these holy pursuits. It was not, however, by these means only that he hoped to obtain that perfection in sanctity after which he was striving. To the assiduous cultivation of devotion he added the practice of the most rigid asceticism : his food consisted solely of bread, a pound of which, it is said, he divided into four parts, one only of which he allowed himself a day ; deferring that, his spare and single meal, till the evening. It was thus he conformed to his favourite maxim, that hunger and thirst ought never to be fully satisfied ; and as he was a man of large stature, his body became by these means almost reduced to a skeleton.*

Remote as he lived from the world, the holiness of Marcianus found fame ; and his example inspired several persons with an eager desire to pursue the same mode of securing the favour of Heaven. Among these were two young men named Eusebius and Agapetus, who were so intent on this object, that they applied to the saint for permission to take up their abode with him. He consented to their request ; and the new anchorites built themselves cabins sufficiently near to that of their master to be able to join him in his prayers, and attend upon his instructions. Agapetus, however, after some time, left the desert to diffuse his precepts among other religious persons, and Eusebius remained alone with Marcianus. Every day contributed to increase the disciple's veneration for his teacher ; and

* Tillemont. Theodoretus, Vit. Pat. The work of this early historian contained the lives of only such hermits as he had either conversed with personally, or had received intelligence of from those who had seen them. His narrative, therefore, gives a true representation of the current notions of the age.

some stories are related of the proofs which he received of his sanctity, and of the divine favour he enjoyed, which, though not worthy of credit as matters of history, serve to show how highly asceticism was estimated in those remote ages of Christianity, when its pure doctrines and simple precepts began to be mingled with the inventions of its professors. Eusebius, it is reported, was one night excited by a feeling of curiosity to discover how his master passed the long hours of darkness. Leaving his cabin, therefore, he proceeded to that of Marcianus, and, peeping cautiously through the little casement, he beheld the saint intently occupied in reading the Scriptures, on which, as he held them in his hand, there fell a divine light sufficiently strong and clear to enable him to pursue his studies, while the desert and the cabin itself were completely involved in darkness.

On another occasion, Eusebius was reverently watching the expression of his master's countenance, full of holy thought, when he perceived one of the poisonous serpents in which the desert abounded crawling near his person. Terrified at the sight, he suddenly warned Marcianus of his danger; but the latter, instead of manifesting any alarm or haste to escape, stretched his hand towards the dangerous animal, which was instantly shattered into a hundred pieces. Other stories of the same kind are related of this celebrated anchorite; and, considering the reputation which it hence appears he possessed, it is probable that he was really believed to have the power of working miracles, and of curing the sick, in the same manner as the apostles. At the period when he lived there must have been numerous traditions afloat of wonders wrought by the uninspired saints of the first two or three centuries; and, considering that it has ever been a very disputed point, whether miracles did or did not cease immediately after the apostolic period, we may account for many of the strange relations handed down to us respecting the power attributed to the men of whom we are speaking.

Marcianus, however, is said to have been very backward in affording any indication of his power, except when charity obliged him to exercise it; and it was then concealed as much as possible from the eyes of the curious. But it may, perhaps, be doubted, whether some of the stories related of him in this respect have not had their origin in a desire to exalt his miraculous endowments, rather than in a wish to give proofs of his humility. Of this doubtful character is the anecdote told of his curing a sick child, the father of which had sent a messenger with directions to use every method he could devise to obtain the saint's assistance. But Marcianus, says the story, rebuked the importunate servant, and drove him from his cell, neither wishing to have it supposed that he could work miracles, nor liking to be disturbed by such an intruder on his solitude. The messenger was, therefore, obliged to return to his master, whose countenance he dreaded to see after this failure of his last hope; but before he reached home, he was met by some persons in the neighbouring fields, who informed him that the child was cured; and upon his making enquiries respecting this unexpected event, he was told that it took place on such a day, and at such an hour, which he recollected to be those in which he had pressed his suit most urgently with the anchorite. This relation is an evident copy of the record respecting our Saviour's cure of the centurion's servant; and is of course to be classed with the innumerable traditions of the same kind, which would not deserve to be even mentioned but for the reason before named; the assistance, namely, which they afford us in estimating the value which the Christian world was beginning to place on the exercise of personal austerities and mortifications.*

The humility of Marcianus is better shown by what is said of his unwillingness to speak when any

* It is the fault almost uniformly committed by Jortin, in his *Remarks on Ecclesiastical History*, to lose sight of the use of traditions in this respect.

one was present from whom he could hope to receive the smallest benefit. Some persons, it appears, had travelled a considerable way to visit him, and having been admitted to his presence, they sat a long time anxiously expecting that he would commence the conversation; but finding him refuse to break silence, one of them modestly suggested that they were greatly desirous of enjoying that divine eloquence of his, which would be to them like sweet water to the thirsty. At hearing which, Marcianus sighed deeply, and replied, "God speaks both by the things which he has made and by his holy Scriptures: He thereby admonishes us as to what is right, teaches us what is useful, warns us by his threats, and encourages us by promises; but, alas! we make no use of his instructions. How, then, can it be believed that any one would be profited by what Marcianus might say?"

On another occasion he was visited by an anchorite from a distant quarter of the country, whose celebrity and piety were equal to his own. When he heard of his approach, he hastened to meet him, and directed his disciple Eusebius to boil some pulse, if any could be found in the cabin or in the neighbourhood. The two saints then entered into close conversation on the several trials they had endured, and on the hopes which they had found to glow the brighter the more they denied themselves the gratifications after which the rest of men so anxiously laboured. After enjoying themselves in this manner for some time, Eusebius appeared with a little table and some bread, on which Marcianus said to his guest, "Now, most venerable Avitus, we will partake together of this fare;" to which his companion replied, "I do not remember when I have ever eaten any thing before the evening; and I not unfrequently pass two and even three days without taking food at all."—"But receive some now," rejoined Marcianus, "for my sake; for I am too weak to wait till evening." But Avitus continued to refuse, till his host said he was deeply afflicted that he should

have come so far to see him, since he must now think that, instead of having found a man fond of toil, and a philosopher, he had only met with an idle and intemperate worldling." Avitus was so moved by this expression of his friend's sorrow, that he consented to take some food, observing that he would rather suffer even to be fed on meat than to hear Marcianus speak so again.

Some time after this, he was visited by his sister and her son, who brought with them a large quantity of various provisions, which in their simplicity they supposed might contribute to the saint's comfort; but his sister he would not indulge himself to see, and it was only by special favour that he consented to hold any conversation with his nephew. When the youth, moreover, was admitted to his cell, and requested him to accept the present which his mother had brought him, he asked him how many monasteries they had visited, and what benefactions they had bestowed upon them? The lad replied, that they had not thought of visiting any. "Hasten then to them," said Marcianus, "with the provisions which you have brought hither: we want not such things here, nor, if we did, would I accept them; for you have shown in this your benevolence more regard to natural feeling than to piety."

Zeno was a man of considerable wealth, and a native of Pontus. Inspired by the same zeal as that which influenced the devout enthusiasts already mentioned, he resigned the hopes which his previous ambition had induced him to cherish, to obtain a place among the remarkable men, who had so little in common with his former associates. Holding a situation of some eminence in the army, he was travelling with letters from the emperor at Antioch, when he passed a lowly sepulchre among the hills near that city; and, being fond of contemplation, he was induced to turn aside to refresh himself by some devout exercise. The place, and the satisfaction he found there, induced him to resolve upon making it his permanent abode. As de-

votion was his only object in this retreat, he denied himself the most common necessities of existence. He had neither a bed, nor fire, nor candle, nor oil, nor books. His clothes were of the worst kind, and his shoes too old to keep his feet from being hurt by the rocks. The only food which he took was bread, brought him every two days by a servant, and water which he fetched himself from a fountain at a distance. Sometimes when a passenger, aware of his sanctity, expressed uneasiness at seeing him carry the water, and offered to ease him of the burden, Zeno would answer, that he could not drink water carried by another. When this reply would not suffice, and he was obliged to let the stranger bear the vessels, he followed him to the entrance of his cell, and then taking them, immediately poured out the water and returned to the fountain. Theodoretus relates, that when he first saw him he was carrying his water vessels ; and on his enquiring where he could find the holy Zeno, he answered that there was no monk so called. Conjecturing, however, that it was modesty only which induced him to conceal his proper name, he followed him, and entering his cell, saw one couch made of straw, and another so constructed, as to afford a less painful resting-place to any stranger who might happen to visit him. When Theodoretus, who was then a very young man, but in orders, begged his blessing, he modestly replied, that it was for him, who was a minister of God, to give the benediction, and not for one, who was but a private individual. The young priest, however, firmly resisted this proposal, and Zeno was persuaded to give the blessing ; but only for the sake, he said, of love and obedience.

These were far from being the only celebrated anchorites of the primitive ages* ; but the above sketch of their characters and habits of living may be sufficient to show the tendency which existed, as early as the third

* Both Socrates and other early historians have given long lists of the celebrated solitaries of this period, and borne testimony to their virtues and influence.

and fourth centuries, to place an undue value on bodily mortifications. There is great reason to believe, that this inclination to exalt the merit of voluntary penances was closely connected, in principle, with the indiscreet ardour which led some of the most pious men who lived about the same periods to expose themselves unnecessarily to the danger of martyrdom. But, however this may be, the knowledge we possess of the readiness with which the ascetics sacrificed the most natural and harmless dispositions of humanity to their rigid notions of religious duty, throws considerable light on the transactions of the ages in which they lived. It was from them several of the most conspicuous opposers of error derived the instructions which encouraged them in the firm pursuit of their noble purposes. Athanasius, Chrysostom, and Augustine were frequent visitors to the solitaries of the desert; and it appears, from the lives or writings of other eminent saints, that it was the custom of young religious men, anxious to obtain a high degree in knowledge and piety, to seek the cells of such men as Zeno or Marcianus, and learn from their lips lessons of profound humility or fortitude. It is not unworthy of notice, therefore, that the ascetics must have exercised a greater influence over the church and its principal members than is generally supposed; and we may trace some of their most hurtful superstitions, and their most admirable virtues, to the examples or instructions of these recluses. Their holiness was undoubted; and it was, there is every reason to believe, sincere and genuine. The influence which this alone necessarily gave them in the church was of the highest kind; and whatever they practised would, consequently, be regarded as most excellent to be imitated. But as many of them were under the influence of a strong imagination, and of thoughts driven out of their natural course by enthusiasm, they easily became enamoured of superstition, such as it usually is when born in solitude,—stern, gloomy, and unyielding. It is not wonderful, that those who venerated these holy

men as the most beloved of Heaven, should not be able to discern their errors, but should rather strive to imitate their practices ; and hence the introduction of those various penances into the early systems of church government, which, in the end, led to the ruin of moral discipline. But, on the other hand, examples of so much self-denial, and patient contemplation, could not be witnessed without benefit ; and when the power of simple truth declined, they contributed, it is probable, in a very considerable degree, to keep combatants in the field on the side of religion, who would otherwise have listlessly yielded to fear or indifference.

CHAP. VIII.

REIGN OF ARCADIUS AND HONORIUS. — STATE OF MANNERS. — CHARACTER OF THE EMPERORS. — THEIR SUCCESSORS. — SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. — PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL. — TROUBLES. — NESTORIAN AND EUTYCHIAN CONTROVERSY. — COUNCILS HELD IN REFERENCE TO THAT DISPUTE. — THE FATE OF NESTORIUS AND EUTYCHES.

THE period on which we are now about to enter is one of great, but, we may add, of melancholy interest. A.D. 395. It was in this century that all those circumstances, by the operation of which the Roman empire was so soon to be overthrown, were beginning to manifest their strength, and prove the invincible grasp they had taken of the mighty pillars on which it had hitherto rested immovable. While the throne was occupied by men of vigour and ability, the approaches of decay might be concealed, and the causes even by which it was produced retarded in their operation. A victory over the barbarians, while it repressed their growing insolence, inspired the Romans, for a brief interval, with a feeling of ancient patriotism, and with a triumph

in their memory, though over an inferior foe, they could scarcely at once sink into indifference or lethargy. Still better calculated was the institution of wise laws, and a firm administration of justice, to keep back the multitude of assailants with which, from within as well as from without, the empire was attacked; and had the sons of Constantine, or their successors, possessed a fair proportion of his energy and abilities, the august fabric of Roman greatness might still have been kept standing, though not uninjured.

But neither Arcadius nor Honorius, who governed respectively the eastern and western divisions of the empire, had the slightest claim to the respect of their subjects, or the fear of their enemies. Both soft and luxurious in their habits, the slaves of their ministers and favourites, they seemed only to occupy their exalted station to tempt the mockery, and invite the approaches, of the hardy barbarians, who were every instant on the watch to pour their hordes into the richest provinces of the realm. Not a trace, it would seem, existed of that simplicity of manners which was considered, in a previous age, a necessary characteristic of the Christian profession. The sermons of Chrysostom are many of them in a strain which would have fitted them for the most frivolous or licentious of modern courts; and passages might be selected from them which would lead us to suppose that most of the ordinary customs of the pagan world had gradually become naturalised on the soil so plentifully sown, an age before, with the seed of the gospel. In one of his discourses on marriage he says, that Christians ought to banish from their weddings devilish pomps, profane songs, indecent dancings, and the other accompaniments which usually disgraced the nuptials of the most worldly people; and, contrariwise, to introduce the servants of Jesus Christ and his priests, and to have the Saviour himself in person among them, as in the marriage at Cana. "Let no man," he says, "tell me it is the custom: do not tell me of a custom if it be sinful. If the thing be evil in itself, how long soever it has

been in vogue, retrench it ; if it be good and not usual, bring it in. But know that this custom is not ancient, but an innovation. Remember the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca, of Rachel and Jacob : the Scriptures tell us how those weddings were kept. They show, indeed, that there was a feast more plentiful than ordinary ; that relations and neighbours were invited ; but there were no fêtes, no dancings, nor any other shameful excesses, so common in our age. With what reason can you pretend to require chastity in a woman whom you have taught to despise her modesty from the first day of her marriage, and before whom you suffer that to be said and done which your servants would blush to do or hear ? To what purpose do ye bring in a priest to crave a blessing, and immediately after commit the basest actions ?” In language glowing with the richest figures of eloquence, he describes the pomp which attended all the actions of the emperor, and tempts his readers, as he must originally have tempted his hearers, to ask what advantage the church of Christ could have gained from its union with the proud and sensual monarchs who were thenceforth to preside over its councils ?

This question, which rises involuntarily in the mind, receives a melancholy answer in the record of the events which occurred at the period about to be described. The influence of the clergy must evidently have been considerably diminished, or the manners of their respective flocks could never have acquired that strong taint of corruption to which so many allusions are made in the writings of the times. Or, if this were not the case, the clergy in general must themselves have ceased to lay that stress upon sanctity as an essential in the Christian character which formerly constituted the basis of their addresses. Whichever be true, there can be little doubt but that the superior orders of the hierarchy, with the exception of some few distinguished men, no longer exhibited those examples of self-denial and meekness, of patient piety and laborious attention to

their duties, which had, till of late, been the sole foundation on which they rested their claims to the respect of the people. There were several causes, perhaps, at work in the production of this change; but the most prominent, and apparently the most active, was the too great familiarity which the heads of churches had contracted with courts and princes. John the Baptist could occupy only the dungeon of Herod's palace; and sad would it have been for the early community had Paul, won by the praises of Festus or Felix, become their convert, while he endeavoured to make them his.

The miserable state of the empire contributed greatly, under these circumstances, to disturb the tranquillity and advancement of the church. Christians seemed to have embarked their chief treasure in the same vessel as the rest of mankind; and having been delivered, by the mercy of God, from the evils of persecution, to have returned to the world, that they might suffer in its miseries and turmoil.

Arcadius and his brother had each been placed by their father under a guardian whose ambition was at least equal to his ability; and at the very commencement of their reign the implacable animosity of these powerful rivals began to exhibit itself in a manner ruinous to the security of the empire. Having been guilty of excesses which would have rendered the sovereign himself odious to the people, Rufinus, the guardian of Arcadius, who possessed the eastern portion of the empire, conceived the idea of elevating himself to equal authority with his pupil, and to effect his object by creating commotions which he considered his own abilities only would be sufficient to suppress. Scarcely had he formed this project, when the Huns and Goths burst, at the signal he had displayed, into the defenceless provinces of both the East and the West. Their arms were long triumphant; and the world, it is probable, would have been quickly parcelled out among the barbarian princes, but for the courage of Gainas, a Gothic

officer, who, at the instigation of Stilicho, put an end at once to the treason and the life of Rufinus.

But no sooner was the imbecile Arcadius freed from the control of his bold and ambitious guardian, than he allowed himself to be involved in the trammels of a far more disgraceful vassalage. An eunuch, named Eutropius, a man of subtle mind, and skilled in all the arts which are prized in courts, obtained so powerful an ascendancy over his mind, that he put the chief authority of the state in his hands, and made him the arbiter of the lives and fortunes of the highest persons in the realm. The ambition and vanity of Eutropius kept pace with his fortune, and he affected the ensigns of authority with as much earnestness as he sought possession of the reality. At length the people, deeming themselves insulted by this assumption of dignity on the part of a menial, readily yielded to the suggestions of his loftier enemies, and demanded him as a sacrifice to their vengeance. The emperor yielded; and the miserable Eutropius, who fled to the altar of the cathedral for refuge, was only saved from instant destruction by the eloquence of Chrysostom. The respite, however, thus gained for him was but brief, and the favourite of Arcadius fell as unpitied as he had lived despised.*

But the causes of distress and confusion in the state were too deeply seated to be removed by the death of Eutropius. The government, throughout the reign of Arcadius, was shared between his servants and his wife Eudoxia, whose hatred to Chrysostom was, considering her character, as honourable to the bishop as it was disgraceful to herself. From these united circumstances, the troubles of the church were commensurate with those of the empire. Heresy took encouragement from the confusion which prevailed; the votaries of paganism in the West strove to propagate the notion that it was only since the introduction of Christianity

* Socrates, *Hist. Eccles.* lib. vi. c. 5. Gibbon, c. 32.

that public distress had existed ; and the invasions of the barbarians, the ravages of famine and pestilence, and the earthquakes which about this time occurred in various parts of the world, served like a persecution to sift the church and prove the faith of its members.

The fate of Chrysostom here claims our particular notice.* This remarkable man, who, from his earliest years, was conspicuous for his eloquence, had been appointed to the see of Constantinople. According to the most credible accounts, the state of religion in that diocese was far from being such as a man of Chrysostom's piety and severe character would desire. From the commencement of his episcopal labours, therefore, he found himself obliged to oppose many of the most influential of his clergy, and to set an example of self-denial and austerity of living little agreeable to men who had been accustomed to enjoy, with hardly any restraint, the luxuries of the imperial capital. In the arrangement of his own household he was so economical, that he was able to found a variety of hospitals, and comfort numerous poor persons, with the sums which he saved out of the usual expenditure of his revenues. This excellent union of economy and charity, together with the most assiduous attention to the duties of prayer and preaching, rendered him an object of warm admiration to the people. But in proportion to the increase of his popularity, those who suffered by the reform he was anxious to introduce, became more and more desirous of effecting his ruin ; and on the arrival of Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, his declared and inveterate enemy, at Constantinople, a strong party was instantly formed, determined to carry their wishes into execution.† In order to accomplish this, Theophilus held a council in the neighbourhood of Chalcedon, whither he was attended

* He was born at Antioch about the year 347, and received ordination as presbyter in 386. Socrates, *Hist. lib. vi. c. 11.* Theodoretus, *lib. v. c. 28.* Cave, *Hist. Lit. art. Chrysostom.* Tillemont ; and Basnage, *Hist. de l'Eglise.*

† Socrates, *Hist. lib. vi. c. 9.* ; where it appears, that one of the earliest causes of the enmity of Theophilus, was the reception which Chrysostom gave to some ecclesiastics deposed by that patriarch.

by thirty-six bishops, and there prepared to decide the fate of Chrysostom by one of the most outrageous violations of the episcopal dignity that was ever committed by one member of that order towards another. The intended victim of these machinations was not ignorant of what was plotting against him ; but he was destitute of the means necessary to resist so powerful a party. The empress Eudoxia also, a woman of violent temper, had been for some time desirous of avenging herself for an affront which she was supposed to have received in one of his sermons ; and she consequently forwarded the intentions of his enemies with all the influence she possessed. Thus menaced, Chrysostom had no resource but his piety and fortitude, and on these he depended without shrinking. “ A terrible storm,” said he, in one of his sermons preached at this time, “ is approaching ; but we have no fear of sinking, for we are founded on a rock : what, in fact, can I have to dread ? Death ? Jesus Christ is my life, and death is my gain ! Exile ? The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof ! Confiscation ? We brought nothing into the world, and we can carry nothing out ! ” To the summons which was sent him to appear before the council, he replied that he would with great willingness attend, provided his known enemies were not allowed to preside as judges. To Theophilus himself he objected, because he was heard to say, as he came out of Alexandria, “ I am going to depose John.” He urged the same reason against three other bishops, and intimated his resolution not to appear before the synod till these persons were ejected from the tribunal. No attention, however, was paid to his protests ; and, after summoning him three times without avail, the assembly proceeded with the measures on which it had previously resolved. Chrysostom was, accordingly, deposed in form ; and a letter being sent to the emperor Arcadius, a weak and ignorant monarch, containing an account of the trial, the bishop was forthwith expelled his church. This was not effected without considerable difficulty. For three days the

populace surrounded the cathedral into which he was known to have retired, and from which they were resolved no force should drag him. What would have been the result of a conflict between his numerous partisans and the officers of the emperor it is not easy to decide ; but, to avoid the tumult and bloodshed which must have been the consequence of such a struggle, he resigned himself into the hands of the persons employed to take him, and was carried to a small town in Bithynia.

His departure was no sooner discovered by the multitude, than their previous murmurs rose into loud and wrathful expressions of vengeance against his persecutors. The next day the tumult was still unsubdued : troops of people besieged the emperor's palace with prayers for the restoration of their beloved bishop ; others poured out execrations on the name of Eudoxia, who, it was believed, had taken the principal part in the obnoxious proceedings. The most lively alarm was thus excited among the courtiers : all apprehended the terrors of a general insurrection ; and Constantinople presented, from one end to the other, a scene of mingled fury and dismay. To add to the confusion, at the moment when the rage of the one and the anxiety of the other party were at their height, the motions of an earthquake were felt, and a thousand voices were instantly heard exclaiming, that it was a token of divine anger at the persecution of the holy Chrysostom. Eudoxia herself, it is said, trembled at the ominous coincidence, and now besought the emperor to recall the bishop with as much earnestness as she had before solicited his condemnation. Arcadius was himself too much alarmed to deny her request ; and messengers were immediately despatched to bring Chrysostom back to Constantinople.

His return was hailed and commemorated by the people with every demonstration of enthusiasm ; but he had not long resumed the exercise of his functions, when the empress, by desiring her statue to be placed in

the neighbourhood of the church, again led him to commit some offence against her pride.* Theophilus lost no time in availing himself of this circumstance: a new cabal was formed, and Chrysostom was again ordered into exile. He was, as before, obliged to employ a stratagem to escape the watchful affection of his people; but his departure was this time attended with more fatal consequences than on the previous occasion. Deprived of their pastor, the numerous congregations which had assembled in the cathedral to celebrate a festival, left the church, attended by some priests, and proceeded to the baths of Constantine, where they intended to complete their devotions, and baptize some catechumens who were waiting to receive that sacrament. But scarcely had they reached the baths, when they were assailed by a body of 500 soldiers, sent to disperse them: violences of every description were committed by their barbarous pursuers; the females were outraged; the priests severely wounded, and many of the worshippers seized and forced away to prison. Unfortunately, on the very day of Chrysostom's departure, the cathedral took fire; and it being at once suspected that his followers were guilty of planning its destruction, they were pursued and punished with redoubled cruelty. A priest and a reader were submitted to the most dreadful tortures, to force from them a confession of the crime; but persisting in the assertion of their innocence, the one was kept on the rack till he expired, and the other, having had sufficient strength to endure his agonies, was sent to die in exile.

Chrysostom himself was treated without any regard either to his station, or the infirmities of his constitution. The officer and soldiers, to whose custody he had been committed, compelled him to travel day and night without cessation, till they arrived at Cæsarea, in Cappadocia, where he was seized with a severe fever, the necessary consequence of the extreme fatigue to which his exhausted frame had been exposed. He trusted, however, that he

* Socrates, *Hist. lib. vi. c. 18.*

should be allowed to repose for a time in quiet, now that he was so far beyond the reach of the affectionate people who had provoked his enemies by rising in his defence. In this he was disappointed: he had hardly prepared himself for rest, when a party of rude and bigoted monks surrounded the house in which he was lodged, and demanded his instant dismissal. The governor of the town for some time endeavoured to appease the intolerant rancour of these religionists; but his efforts were repulsed with indignation, and the unfortunate prelate was obliged to resume his journey, suffering as he was under the violent attacks of an acute fever. For more than a month he was exposed to the united evils of sickness, confinement in the midst of savage, implacable soldiers, and the many other troubles which to a sick and nervous traveller could not be trifling. At length, after a journey occupying about seventy days, he arrived with his guards at the town of Arcasias, among the ridges of Mount Taurus, where he was received by the bishop of the place in a manner so affectionate, that it almost atoned for the toil to which he had been so unjustly subjected in his long and painful journey. The same attention was also shown him by a wealthy layman of the town, who afforded him a comfortable lodging in his house, and sought, by every means in his power, to save him from the injuries of the severe climate to which he was thus suddenly exposed. For three years was the illustrious prelate confined in this remote region; but his solitude and privations neither diminished the rancour of his enemies, nor injured the activity of his mind. The attempts which were made in his favour by numerous partisans as well in the West as in the East, stirred up the base and interested faction which had procured his deposition, to employ the vilest arts to prevent his restoration. How little he feared their menaces, or was deterred by them from pursuing the course which his conscience had marked out to him, was made sufficiently evident by the bold and extensive plans he continued to form for the reformation

of the church. Comprehending in his paternal affection every district over which he could exercise any influence, he from time to time addressed the people in letters, the eloquence of which lost none of its force from the recollection of his misfortunes, but, by its effect on the popular mind, made both his private enemies and the enemies of religion itself tremble for the success of their machinations. It was while filled with apprehensions at these repeated attacks of the exiled bishop on their authority, that the party of Theophilus at Constantinople renewed their appeals to the wavering Arcadius, and obtained an order for the further removal of Chrysostom to the town of Pytius, a wretched, lonely place at the extremity of the desert of that name, on the eastern shore of the Euxine. The commission was executed in the same ruthless manner as that which had directed his removal from Constantinople. Though suffering under the weight of accumulating infirmities, he was hurried along with all the speed which his robust and merciless guards could use; and he had not yet reached the coast of the Euxine, when the little strength he possessed was exhausted, and he fell a martyr to their barbarity.*

A temporary, but very brief, improvement took place in the aspect of affairs on the accession of Theodosius the younger, who, placing himself under the direction of his sister Pulcheria, a woman of great capacity and ardent piety, devoted himself with laudable zeal to heal the wounds which religion had received during the reign of his father. But, though fitted to do honour to any private station, the youthful emperor had few of the qualities which should be the peculiar endowment of a prince; and his sister, though possessing superior powers of mind, had too strong a bias in favour of asceticism to allow of her exercising them to the

* A heavy charge has been brought against Chrysostom, on account of the efforts he made to enlarge the boundaries, and increase the power, of his patriarchate. The authority which he exercised led to the idea that he was a sort of vicar to the Roman pontiff; a notion which could only have had its rise among the most zealous defenders of papal supremacy. See Basnage, *Histoire de l'Eglise*, lib. vi. c. 2.

utmost advantage. The evils, consequently, of which the progress had, for a short time, been retarded, soon again became visible, and the reign of Theodosius was concluded amid calamities as great as those which clouded that of Arcadius. Pulcheria, who found herself in possession of the supreme authority on the demise of her brother, shrunk from the exercise of it in her own person, and espoused Marcian, a man of worth, but a subject, elevating him to the throne on the condition that he should only regard her as his sister. They were both conscientiously desirous of promoting the welfare of their people and the cause of religion, and their labours were, in some measure, crowned with success ; but they reigned too short a time to effect much permanent good. Their successor Leo, who occupied the throne seventeen years, was too avaricious to imitate, in all respects, the wise example they had set ; but he is commended for his orthodoxy ; and, though almost wholly uninstructed in the learning of the times, is said to have been generally deserving of praise for the prudence of his counsels.

Zeno, the son-in-law of Leo, succeeded him on the throne ; but so disgraced himself by the most flagitious vices, that his subjects obliged him, by signs of wrath too evident to be mistaken, to seek his safety in flight. Basiliscus, his brother-in-law, taking advantage of his abdication, immediately assumed the ensigns of the imperial dignity ; and, notwithstanding the fall of his predecessor, proceeded to the commission of similar violences. But he had scarcely commenced his system of misrule, when the people of Constantinople heard that Zeno was returning, at the head of an army of Isaurians, to re-assert his authority. Basiliscus, who had become more hateful to them than that tyrant, with all his excesses, was deserted by his oppressed subjects, taken captive by Zeno, and, being thrown into a dungeon, was left to perish of hunger. During his short reign, the church suffered greatly from his tyranny, and the heresies which had newly arisen enjoyed an unexpected triumph.

The restored monarch, influenced, we may suppose, rather by a determination to oppose the counsels of his rival than to favour the church, rescinded, without delay, all the edicts of Basilicus; and, for a short time, affairs wore a more promising aspect. But a man like Zeno was not likely to proceed with much uniformity in measures which regarded religion; and, influenced by some of the leading men among the schismatics, he passed the Henoticon, or edict of union, by which the orthodox were, in fact, commanded to slur over the most distinguishing portion of their creed, and profess in words the same belief as the Eutychians. So monstrous an ordinance roused all the zeal of the faithful, and the greatest part of Christendom was thrown into a state of the utmost confusion. This event took place in the year 482. Zeno lived about nine years longer, and was succeeded by Anastasius, whose reign extended into the following century.

Having thus briefly given the succession of emperors during this troubled period, we will now take a closer view of those events, in their respective reigns, which so materially affected the state of the church. But it is worthy of being observed, that, amid all the confusion which prevailed in the very heart of Christendom, the gospel continued to make new and important conquests in regions whither it had not hitherto penetrated. The inhabitants of Libanus and Antilibanus are said to have been converted by the preaching of Simeon Stylites, who, by his efficacious prayers, delivered them from the wild beasts which infested their neighbourhood. Many of the barbarian tribes also, in establishing themselves in their newly acquired conquests, embraced the faith; and even a large body of Jews, inhabitants of Crete, opening their eyes to the true meaning of their prophetic records, acknowledged their fulfilment in the person of Christ. The immediate cause of their conversion deserves to be mentioned, as indicative of the ready attention given in this age to the boldest pretenders to divine authority.

One of their own nation, taking advantage of their enthusiasm, declared himself to be Moses, and asserted that he had been sent from heaven to conduct them through the sea to the land of promise, as he had done, in ancient times, through the Red Sea. Having assured them moreover that they had no further need of money, on the day appointed for their setting forth, he led them to a promontory which overhung the sea, and commanded them to leap with confidence into the deep. The foremost ranks of the deluded multitude instantly obeyed; and while numbers of them sunk to rise no more, others lay mangled on the sharp points of the jutting rocks, or were seen struggling for life amid the waves. Some were saved by the humane exertions of fishermen and Christian merchants, and the rest of the assembly, undeceived by the miserable fate of their companions, gladly returned to their homes; and, having been led to reflection, forthwith embraced Christianity. The impostor himself was never more seen or heard of; and it was the belief of many that he must have been an evil spirit in a human shape.

Nor must it be forgotten that it was in this century that Ireland was converted by the preaching of the celebrated St. Patrick, who, after labouring in that country forty years, at length established a metropolitan church at Armagh. The conclusion of the century, also, beheld the conversion of the Franks with Clovis, their victorious sovereign, who, having gained the battle of Tolbiacum, while calling on the name of Christ, whom he had hitherto refused to worship, was solemnly baptized at Rheims.

But, gratifying as it is to find that the gospel was in any way extending its influence, it is plain that the conversions of this age were of a very different character to those of earlier times. The Jews of Crete are converted while infuriated with an impostor; the people of Libanus, and Antilibanus at the preaching of an enthusiastical ascetic, and the king of the Franks in the pride and exultation of victory. It can hardly

be doubted but that the views which these several converts took of Christianity must have been sadly imperfect, and that, though their conversion effected a change for the better in their manners, their reception of the Christian name ought not to be considered as the proof of a real accession to the church.

Whatever degree of prosperity, moreover, may seem indicated by these events, it was fearfully counterbalanced by the violence which the yet unconverted barbarians exercised against the vanquished Christians, and by the dissensions which prevailed to so deplorable an extent among the Christians themselves. On looking beyond the immediate confines of Christendom, a still darker scene presents itself. Persia, about the year 421, was deluged with torrents of Christian blood, and tortures were endured by the faithful not inferior to those which had been suffered by their forefathers in the reign of Nero. Even here, however, our sympathy is checked by well-grounded suspicions, that this persecution owed its origin as much to the imprudence of the Christians as to the cruelty or enmity of the Persians. The first occasion of dispute was afforded by Abda bishop of Suza, who pulled down one of the temples dedicated to fire, and, on refusing to repair the injury, at the command of the king, was put to death. The Persians appear to have satisfied themselves on this occasion with retaliating on the sect in general, by pulling down their churches; and the fiercer spirit of revenge which broke out some time after, is attributable to the belief which prevailed, that the Romans, then at war with Persia, were aided by their secret counsels.*

But these calamities could have produced no permanent injury to the church. They might have occasioned a long series of individual trials; and the congregation of believers might have been seen clothed

* Theodoretus, lib. v. c. 39. The historian confesses that the zeal of Abda was intemperate; and observes, that St. Paul, when at Athens, attempted no violence against the altars which he there saw around him.

in the garb of penitents, meek and unpretending in their demeanour, rather than invested with the ensigns of a triumphant sect: but their patience would have been a nobler and a far more certain sign of the prosperity of the true church than any of the favours it received from princes; and the divisions and unchristian haughtiness which now prevailed among almost every order of its members led to evils which, instead of trying their faith or patience, struck at the very root of their piety.

Heresy requires many concomitant circumstances to aid its progress; and, like sedition, will, in sound and healthy times, soon lose its original strength for want of proper nourishment. But the period now described was one peculiarly fit to foment a spirit both of heresy and schism. It abounded in temptations for the ambitious, in excitements for the enthusiastic, and in delusions for the weak; and the consequence was, that two of the most dangerous heresies with which the Christian world has been troubled, agitated the church through the whole of this century.

Arianism had by this time founded an empire for itself. A large proportion of the christianised Goths, and a great part of the African provinces, professed it as their established creed; and those who opposed it met with the most barbarous usage. But the feelings which inspired the disputatious ardour of logicians and theological rhetoricians were far from being aided by the introduction of the law of the sword; and Arianism was thus become much less likely than formerly to excite or interest polemics. Any new subject for contention was, consequently, almost sure to attract a number of zealous disputants; and the dogmas of Nestorius and Eutyches furnished abundance of inflammatory food for the violent and ruling spirits of the age.*

The former of these celebrated schismatics was a native of Syria, and acquired, at an early period of his ministry, great reputation for eloquence. In the year

* Tillemont. Fleury, Hist. Ecclés. Cave, Hist. Lit. art. Nestorius.

428 he was appointed bishop of Constantinople ; and scarcely had he ascended the patriarchal chair when the fierce despotism of his nature, as well as his abilities, shone forth, to the terror of both the clergy and the people. “ Sire,” exclaimed he, in his first sermon before the emperor, “ free the earth from heretics, and I will give you heaven ; join me in the war against them, and I will join you in the war against the Persians.” Pride, it is probable, lies at the root of many heresies ; and in the case of Nestorius, as well as in some other instances, it revealed itself as if on purpose to furnish mankind with an index to the truth.

A sufficient number of zealots existed at that time in Constantinople to applaud his sentiments and enlist themselves under his banner. The strictness of his manners served to extend his fame among those who had not the power of judging of his talents ; and his enemies were soon obliged to yield to an influence thus established on the firm basis of authority and reputation. That he exercised his power without mercy, crushing those who opposed him with the hand of a tyrant, and treating the principal sectaries of the day like malefactors, deserving the wrath of man and of God, was no fault in the eyes of his admirers. His throne remained firm : his credit with the emperor was continually on the increase ; and his views were seconded by the sovereign as well as by his partisans.

But while he was thus enjoying the plenitude of patriarchal power, a circumstance occurred which at the same time threw a stumbling-block in the way of his career, and shook the church to its centre. Words and modes of speech had long become weapons, which the church had much greater need to fear than the sword. The growing superstition of the people was favourable to the introduction of expressions which would never have been tolerated in a different state of things ; and the admission of these expressions, while they pleased the ignorant, and flattered fanaticism, afforded a new and powerful temptation to controversy.

Among those who beheld, with the mingled regret of a Christian and the pride of a philosopher, the corruption which had taken place in the phraseology of devotion, was the presbyter Anastasius ; a man whose merits and defects may, perhaps, both be understood from the circumstance that he was the friend and favourite of Nestorius. " Let no man call Mary the mother of God," was his exhortation to the congregation over which he presided. " Mary was a woman, and God cannot be born of a woman."* The greatest excitement was occasioned by the boldness with which Anastasius supported this opinion : the people, with their principal favourites among the clergy, ranged themselves against him ; but he had on his side not only the prelate, Dorotheus, who proclaimed an anathema against all who should employ the disputed expression, but the patriarch himself. It was not likely that the controversy would soon cease between such opponents : the sermons of Nestorius having been sent to Alexandria, Cyril, then bishop of that see, found himself obliged to take part in the question : it thus acquired fresh importance ; and, the last-mentioned prelate having declared in favour of the obnoxious phrase, a correspondence commenced between these two powerful bishops, which only served to enlarge the occasion of dispute.†

The pride of Nestorius, his zeal and elevated situation, all united to urge him forward with a vehemence not always to be found even in determined controversialists. Enraged at finding his orthodoxy doubted, because he denied the propriety of a phrase which had really little to do with doctrine, he employed a language which seemed to approach the verge of the most heretical ; and when no longer able to support himself in his station, he was at once driven into the ranks of

* Evagrius, *Hist. Eccles.* lib. i. c. 3.

† The authority of the bishops of Alexandria was at its height at this period. " It was so great," says Basnage, " that it made not only the clergy and the suffragans tremble, but the people and the government of the city " *Hist. de l'Eglise*, liv. ii. c. 10. The promptness with which Cyril expelled the Jews from Alexandria, is a proof of his almost unlimited power. Sozocrates, *Hist.* lib. vii. c. 13.

the most resolute schismatics. Pope Celestine, to whom Nestorius and his enemies had respectively applied, and sent documents of their tenets, assembled a council in the month of August, 430; and in that assembly the doctrines of the patriarch of Constantinople were so far condemned, that it was resolved a notice should be sent him, signifying that, unless he recanted within ten days, and re-embraced the doctrines of the church, he would be deposed, and deprived of communion.* Nothing could be more unjust than the mode in which Celestine left this sentence to be executed. Cyril, to whom he deputed his authority on the occasion, had been from the first the chief and the personal opposer of Nestorius. It appears that he himself fully appreciated the delicacy of the situation in which the decision of the council placed him; for, immediately on receiving the pope's letter, he applied to the bishops of Antioch and Jerusalem to assist him in the execution of his difficult office. The former of these prelates wrote to Nestorius, exhorting him, in a mild and judicious manner, to yield to the general opinion of his brethren; but the patriarch replied, that, as many had abused the expression "the mother of God," and others improperly introduced that of "the mother of man," he would call the Virgin by no other name than "the mother of Christ."†

Had not an uncompromising spirit prevailed to an extraordinary degree, it is difficult to conceive how the opposite party could have found food for persecution in such a confession. Nestorius denied no truth, but only the propriety of an expression which had been unknown to the primitive church, and had never till now been recognised by authority. That he concealed no heresy, under his dislike to this term, was evident from the earnestness with which he declared his belief in the doctrines against which it was supposed to militate. But Cyril, endowed with the authority of the

* Evagrius, lib. i. c. 4. Baronius, *Annal. Eccles.* 430. Du Pin, *Hist. of Council of Ephesus*, *Bibliot. Pat.* Basnage, *liv. x. c. 4.*

† Baronius, § 35., where the letter is quoted at length.

council, proceeded to exercise his power to the utmost ; and in November, having assembled a synod for that purpose, drew up a letter, signifying the pope's previous resolution, and enclosing a confession of faith, with the anathemas appended which were to follow its rejection.

Nestorius, in the mean time, was busily engaged in endeavouring to persuade the emperor Theodosius to assemble a council at Constantinople. The same object, but for a different purpose, was eagerly sought by those whom the tyranny of the patriarch, which had lost no part of its violence, rendered anxious to see his authority suppressed or counterbalanced. Letters were accordingly issued by the emperor, summoning the chiefs of the church to assemble at Ephesus on the next feast of Pentecost ; that to Cyril was couched in terms by no means flattering to his feelings : it accused him of being the main promoter of the troubles which now prevailed, and commanded him expressly to be present at the meeting.*

While each party was anxiously awaiting the assembling of the council, the rival prelates carried on the war of mutual recrimination in a manner as little creditable to themselves as it was profitable to the church. Cyril's letter and anathemas were delivered to Nestorius on a Sunday, and while he was surrounded by his clergy. He treated the threat with contempt ; and having sent the contents of the letter to the bishop of Antioch, with a request that he would see it answered set down himself to compose twelve anathemas, to confer the same advantage on Cyril as that prelate had bestowed on him.

In the beginning of June, 431, the bishops who had been summoned to the council began to arrive at Ephesus from all parts of the East and the West. Cyril, with not less than fifty Egyptian prelates to support his cause, entered that city some days previous to the time appointed ; Nestorius arrived at nearly the same time,

* Baronius calls upon his readers to observe the peril in which kings are placed by listening to religious disputants ; but founds his warning on the letter of Theodosius, which is full of fine and useful sentiments.

but with only ten companions. These distinguished personages were soon followed by others ; and on the twenty-second of the month the synod was opened in the great church of St. Mary. But though it appears there were between 160 and 200 bishops present, the number was yet far from complete. John, bishop of Antioch, was not arrived, and with him was expected a large body of prelates, devoted to the cause of Nestorius. Loud complaints, therefore, were made against Cyril, who had been chosen president, for commencing proceedings ; and Memnon, the bishop of Ephesus, who supported him. To keep up, however, some show of fairness, Nestorius was formally summoned to attend : but the messengers were prevented from entering his house by the guards at the gate ; and the synod, therefore, immediately resumed its discussions. Composed as it was, little doubt could be entertained as to the purport of its decisions. The letters he had written, his sermons and anathemas, were before the men to whose opinions they were especially opposed ; and, late in the evening of the same day on which the council first met, Nestorius was declared a blasphemer against the Lord Jesus Christ, was deposed from his bishopric, and expelled the priesthood.*

Intelligence of this transaction was forthwith despatched to Constantinople both by Cyril and Nestorius. The latter complained, and apparently with justice, of the mode in which his enemies had arrogated to themselves the authority of the council, which he argued could not be considered complete till all the prelates formally invited to its sittings were arrived. His complaint was borne out by the testimony of the count Candidian, whom the emperor had sent to represent him at Ephesus, and preserve the peace of the city. Still further to increase the odium under which Cyril was thus placed, the bishop of Antioch and others from the East, whom the length of their journey had delayed, arrived soon after the hasty decision of the

* Baronius, § 40—61.

council ; and a demand was immediately made that it should be re-assembled, and commence its proceedings altogether anew. Not content with this, the friends of Nestorius continued their opposition to what had been done, by the counter-condemnation of Cyril, and excommunicating him and his party as favourers of Arianism. Scarcely was this done when the emperor's answer arrived ; and Cyril, who had of course wholly disregarded the proceedings of the Nestorians, found that their complaints had been successful. Theodosius directed that whatever had taken place at the council should be rescinded, and that none of the bishops should leave Ephesus till some of his ministers had examined the real state of the business. Cyril replied to this letter of the emperor by another, in which he stated, that the count Candidian had given a partial view of the matter, and begged that he might be allowed to visit Constantinople himself, and explain the whole of the affair in person. A similar epistle was sent by the bishop of Antioch, in which the emperor is earnestly entreated to remove Cyril and Memnon from Ephesus ; and Nestorius himself is stated to have written to a person at court, declaring that he would consent to employ the term in dispute, on condition that Cyril was obliged to renounce his Apollinarian heresy.

The confusion which thus prevailed was not at all diminished by the arrival of the pope's nuncios, who brought a brief from their master, in which he repeated, with increased earnestness, his condemnation of the error of Nestorius. In conformity with his injunctions, the legates established the decrees of Cyril ; and, without delay, wrote to the emperor, requesting leave to depart, as they had thus fulfilled their duty, and now feared the violence of those they had opposed, exhorting him at the same time to appoint some one immediately in the room of Nestorius whom they had deposed.

All that now remained wanting to perfect the triumph of the Alexandrian party was to remove the disgrace which had been done them by the anathemas of John

of Antioch. To clear themselves of the stigma, they employed arguments which, if they considered them valid, ought to have been regarded as sufficient to prevent the necessity of any further proceedings. How could prelates, they said, who were inferior in rank, and who had themselves been previously deposed, dare to pronounce the deposition of others, their superiors, and acting as they were with the authority of the church? But, notwithstanding the plain inference which might have been drawn from the circumstances alluded to, they re-assembled the council: Cyril and Memnon presented a petition in form against John of Antioch; and that prelate, with his associates, was summoned to answer the charge in person. The answer, however, which he gave to the messengers was, that he could have no intercourse with persons whom he and his brethren had excommunicated. This, and the libellous placard with which it was followed, still further enraged the Egyptian bishops, and each party again declared the other deposed and excommunicated.

The council was no sooner broken up than deputies were sent to represent its proceedings to the emperor. Nestorius, on the other hand, charged his friend, count Irenæus, whom he had taken with him to Ephesus, with the defence of his cause. For some time the influence of the two parties at court seemed nearly balanced; but, wearied, at length, with the cavilling spirit, and determined love of strife, which appeared to instigate the chief movers of the dispute, Theodosius came to the determination of confirming the decrees which each party had made against the other, and deposed both Nestorius and Cyril, together with the bishop of Ephesus. This decision was immediately conveyed to that city by a person of distinction, who, on his arrival, assembled the members of the council, and declared to them the emperor's pleasure. A new clamour was raised among the prelates on hearing the message; and count Candidian found himself compelled to sepa-

rate Nestorius and his two principal opponents, by committing all three into custody.

Alarmed at the turn which was thus given to the affair, the party of Cyril sent letters to Constantinople, beseeching the emperor to reconsider the sentence he had passed; and describing, in the strongest terms, the distress they experienced in being so long detained like prisoners at Ephesus. Such was the state of things at this time, that these letters had to be conveyed by a person disguised in the garb of a mendicant, and carried concealed in the hollow of his staff. They reached Constantinople in safety: their contents were made known to the people by an ecclesiastic who presented them to the emperor; and Theodosius found himself obliged to make another effort for the tranquillising of the church. He now directed that deputies should be sent from each party; but ordered that Nestorius should retire to his monastery, and that Cyril and Memnon should be kept in confinement till such time as the question was settled.*

The agitation into which the Christian community had been thrown by this protracted contention, may be conceived from the circumstance, that the deputies of the council, eight from each side, were obliged to stop at Chalcedon; the tumults of the clergy at Constantinople rendering their further progress unadvisable and dangerous. They there awaited the emperor's arrival at his country residence, which he reached at the beginning of September, and forthwith admitted them to an audience. There appears great reason to believe that Theodosius acted with the utmost fairness and candour; and that the decision to which he at length came was forced from him by the unbending obstinacy and factious manœuvres of the rival prelates. On his determining to appoint a new bishop of Constantinople, the party of Nestorius addressed memorials to him, in which they predicted that an incurable schism would be the result of such a measure: that it

* Baronius, An. 431. sect. 125—130.

would be an act of great injustice ; and that the men whom he would thereby be favouring had ever proved inimical to his authority.

But Theodosius was not to be persuaded to retract the decision he had formed ; and in his letter to the council at Ephesus he declared that Nestorius was deposed, but that Cyril and Memnon were to keep possession of their respective sees. He added, however, that he would never consent to consider the Eastern bishops who had been opposed to the triumphant party as heretics, no charge of that nature having been made out against them ; and that in what he had done he had been solely instigated by the desire of healing the wound which had so unfortunately been inflicted on the church.

These measures were followed up by the appointment of Maximian to the see of Constantinople, Nestorius being consigned to retirement in the monastery of Euprepus at Antioch. But the prospect of peace was as far distant as ever. The two parties continued, with undiminished acrimony, to accuse each other of heresy, and the condemnation of Nestorius was pronounced unjust. In this situation of things the emperor had recourse to advisers whose piety seemed likely to give them influence over his turbulent ecclesiastics. Simeon Stylites was exhorted to employ his prayers on the occasion, and no means were omitted which prudence could suggest to give them efficacy. But the confusion continued. All attempts at accommodation were frustrated by the determination of the prelates on either side not to admit their opponents into communion. When, on the other hand, some inclination was shown to yield in point of doctrine, the condemnation of Nestorius remained as a stumbling-block never to be removed. Cyril rejected every proffer of submission on the part of the Eastern bishops, so long as they declared that his rival was not rightly deposed ; and, while he offered to modify the language of his creed to meet their wishes, only the more vehemently in-

sisted on pronouncing Nestorius a heretic. Wearied, however, at length, with the incessant turmoil of controversy, and somewhat moved at the melancholy spectacle which the church, thus divided, exhibited, John of Antioch began to take more efficient measures for promoting a reconciliation ; and after some time consented to allow, for the sake of peace, as he said, that Nestorius had been rightly deposed. His example was followed by other influential men of the party ; and Cyril, having now obtained his object, joyfully admitted them into communion, and modified his confession of faith according to their views.

It might have been supposed that the troubles which had so long agitated the church would now have terminated. But the part which the bishop of Antioch had taken was viewed by many of his former coadjutors with anger and suspicion. His agreement with Cyril rendered their clamours as loud as those which had before been raised by the Egyptians ; while Cyril himself suffered equal odium, on his side, from having accepted the concessions of the Eastern prelates. The pope, during the whole of the dispute, had warmly supported the side of the Alexandrian patriarch, and his sanction to the late acts of the council of Ephesus fixed the more obstinate of them in their determination to admit of no compromising measures. More than one bishop on each side allowed himself to be deprived, rather than agree to the treaty which had been entered into by the chief of his party, nor was it till the most violent of them were expelled their dioceses that even the appearance of tranquillity was restored.

Nestorius was not left long to enjoy the repose of his monastery ; but was banished, in 435, by an imperial edict, first to Petra, and then to the solitudes of the Oasis, where he soon after died. As it was the fashion with the chroniclers of the middle ages to attribute the death of princes to some violent cause, so the early heretics are mostly represented by their adversaries as having been cut off in some manner

typical of the supposed baseness of their life and doctrine. Thus the deposed patriarch is said to have persevered, even in his exile, in the defence of those errors which had so long convulsed the church, and to have suffered captivity, the worst of calamities, by the express appointment of God. Not being cured of his impiety by this correction, he is further said to have experienced the torture of having his tongue eaten through with worms; and in that condition to have expired, an object of hate to all the orthodox.*

Little credit is due to relations of this kind, nor does any part of the preceding narrative tend to raise our opinion of the ecclesiastics of the period. The Nestorian controversy primarily rested on the same basis as some of the earliest which occupied the minds of Christian polemics. At the council of Nice, the godhead of the Son had been clearly and definitively admitted as an essential article of the creed; and the subtlest, the most learned, the ablest as well as the most conscientious men, had found the subjects they were then engaged to discuss of ample extent and difficulty to prove the inefficiency of either reason or learning to clear up divine mysteries. But it is well worthy of observation, that the Nicene fathers, though representing the universal church, only stated, and did not presume to explain, the deep things of God. They declared what they considered might be justly inferred from the revelations of Scripture, but they did not attempt to say how such and such mysteries bore upon each other. In the present disputes, on the contrary, this forbearance entered not into the temper of the controversialists. A disposition had for some time been shown among the African, or Egyptian, and Eastern bishops, to expound the most difficult articles of the received creed; to make these objects of faith subjects for intellectual demonstration, and not simply to unfold the condensed language of Scripture, and explain it by

* Evagrius: who has given the letter of Nestorius, in which he describes his sufferings. He states the report respecting his death from some unknown writer. Hist. lib. i. c. 7.

conformable illustrations, but to unfold the mystery itself, to establish the existence of which is the only proper office of the theologian.

A wide difference, however, prevailed in the modes of interpretation adopted by the two parties alluded to. The Egyptians feared that fatal errors would arise from any representation of the human and divine nature of Christ, which might possibly lead to the idea that they were not perfectly united, and together formed but one being. In conformity with this notion, they employed every kind of expression which served to show the union of the Godhead and manhood in the strongest light; and from the same principle spoke of the actions, proper only to the divine nature, as proceeding equally from the human, and of the sufferings of the man Christ Jesus, as if they had been those of the divinity itself. From a dread of opposite errors, the Eastern bishops ever alluded in the most guarded terms to the union; and, in their desire to avoid saying any thing which seemed derogatory to the majesty of the eternal God, sometimes appeared to adopt a language inconsistent with the single personality of our Lord. This led them into frequent collision with the Egyptian prelates; and each party was disposed to accuse the other of readily favouring opinions, which only the extreme interpretation of their expressions could have conveyed. Apollinaris had really confounded the divine and human nature in his system, and the Egyptians were said to be his disciples. Arius had denied the divinity of Christ; and the Eastern bishops, because they feared to speak loosely of the divinity, were accused of favouring Arianism. It is not difficult to see on which side existed the greater disposition to error, or, at least, which party was in most danger of doing dishonour to God by irreverent expressions. But, unfortunately, Nestorius brought the dispute to an issue in a manner little suited to deprive controversy of its bad effects; and, still worse, his chief opponent was a man as violent and unyielding as himself, and his rival in power. The consequences of the

contest might be easily foreseen. Brotherly charity was long driven from the church ; the study of theology was confined to one branch of enquiry, and deprived of all its unction ; bishops were deposed by rival bishops ; one system of doctrine was opposed to another by warring factions ; and, as with treaties presented by the ambassadors of hostile nations, it not unfrequently happened, that the articles of a creed were made to yield to circumstances, and modified to suit the interests of the disputants, as if any circumstance ought to influence the expression of truths considered intrinsically unchangeable. The church, however, might have rejoiced that its peace had not been disturbed for more than nine or ten years by the Nestorian controversy, had it ceased with the death of the heresiarch ; but it was only the first in a series of disputes which continued to propagate one contest after another, and which, in the end, led to the permanent establishment of two new sects.

Cyril was succeeded in the see of Alexandria by Dioscurus, who, to his predecessor's zeal for the system espoused by the Egyptian prelates, added a new degree of enmity to that with which they had formerly regarded the Nestorians.* It happened, to the further misfortune of the church, that Eutyches, the abbot of a monastery of Constantinople, belonged to the Egyptian party, and sought by every means in his power, while surrounded by ecclesiastics of a different persuasion, to promote the establishment of its peculiar opinions. His sentiments were not unknown to the chief men of the other side ; and Domnus, the successor of John in the see of Antioch, wrote to the emperor complaining of his conduct, and asserting that he was endeavouring to re-establish the heresy of Apollinaris. The meeting of a synod at Constantinople, in November, 448, furnished the opponents of Eutyches with the opportunity of bringing him within their power. Flavian, the patriarch, who, like his predecessors, nourished great jealousy of the bishop of Alexandria, was not unfavourable to

* Evagrius, Hist. lib. i. c. 10.

the measure ; and Eusebius, bishop of Dorylæum, obtained permission to summon the supposed heretic before the meeting.*

The message of the synod was duly conveyed to Eutyches ; but he returned for answer, that he was sick, and that he had solemnly resolved never to leave the boundaries of his monastery, in which he had determined thenceforth to remain buried as in a tomb. As an additional apology, he asserted that his accuser was only influenced by private malice ; that he would willingly subscribe the articles of faith drawn up at Nice and Ephesus ; that he preferred, indeed, the Scriptures to the writings of the fathers, but that, in respect to the subject under consideration, he believed that Christ was perfect God and perfect man, born of the Virgin, yet without having a flesh consubstantial with that of other men, and that he had two natures hypostatically united. These were the answers he gave the two ecclesiastics who had been sent to him from the synod ; but on their being reported to that body, the bishop of Dorylæum insisted upon the necessity of Eutyches being again summoned, and compelled to give his reply in person. Two other messengers were accordingly despatched ; but the monks at the gate of the monastery informed them, that their superior, on account of his sickness, could not be spoken with, and manifested considerable alarm when the messengers insisted on being admitted. Eutyches, when informed of their arrival, directed that they should be admitted, but returned the same answer as before. A third summons was sent the following day ; and to this he replied by sending some of the members of his convent to plead his excuse before the synod. But Eusebius would hear of no argument which tended to relieve him of personal attendance ; and at length it was decided that time should be granted the accused, who, in his last message, had promised to appear as soon as his health permitted.

This indulgence was granted at the instance of Flavian,

* Baronius, *Annal. Eccles.* an. 448. sect. 18.

the bishop of Constantinople, and the synod re-assembled a few days after it had been adjourned. The ecclesiastics who received the answers of Eutyches at the monastery, were now again examined, as to the precise terms in which he couched his replies; and one of them, on being put to the oath, acquainted the meeting that Eutyches had asked them, in the presence of several monks, what passages of Scripture they could produce in which the two natures were spoken of; and which of the fathers had asserted this doctrine? That when they answered these questions by asking in return where the word "consubstantial" was to be met with in Scripture, he replied, that though it was not to be found in Scripture, it was supported by the confessions of the fathers: that when, again, they said that the fathers had acknowledged two natures in Christ, he confessed that Jesus Christ was perfect God and perfect man; but that, when he was urged to acknowledge, therefrom, that there were two natures in Christ, he replied, "God forbid that I should say that Jesus Christ is made up of two natures, or that I should give the Godhead the name of a nature. Let them depose me if they please; but I will die in the faith which I have received from my fathers."

Eutyches, who, it appears, was not unfavoured by the court, was anxiously expected on the day appointed for his examination; but for some time his presence was looked for in vain. At length information was brought the synod, that he was on his way to the place of assembly, attended by a guard of soldiers, and an officer of high rank. He soon arrived at the gate; and the grand silentiary of the palace announced to the fathers that it had been the emperor's pleasure to appoint his minister, Florentius Patricius, to preside at the debate, and see that all things were conducted with order.

The proceedings were commenced with reading the acts of the council of Ephesus; and on the passage being repeated, in which the union of the two natures in Christ is mentioned, the bishop of Dorylæum exclaimed that Eutyches dissented from that doctrine.

It appears, however, that he manifested an undue haste in this assertion, and felt that he had committed himself. Instead of seconding the proposal of Florentius, that the question should be put to Eutyches, he directed the reading of the acts to be continued, and observed, at the same time, that though the accused should now profess the truth, it would not by any means prove that he had not before denied it. Then, alluding to the circumstances in which he stood, he made an appeal to the candour of his auditors, by expressing a fear that the superior wealth and interest of Eutyches might render it either dangerous or unavailing for him to proceed. But being encouraged by the patriarch of Constantinople to resume the examination, he at once demanded of Eutyches whether he assented to the doctrine in question? The answer was given in the affirmative, but, as it would appear, sophistically, or with reserve; for Eusebius immediately put the same question in a different form, and enquired whether the accused believed that there were two natures in Christ after the incarnation, and that the nature of Christ according to the flesh was the same as that of mankind in general? To this Eutyches replied, that his sentiments were stated in the paper he had brought with him, and which, as he came not to dispute, but to declare his opinions, he desired they would receive as his answer. Excusing his inability to read it himself, he consented to reply by stating the substance of its contents. In doing this, he declared his belief to be, that Christ, having taken the flesh of the Virgin, was indeed incarnate. But when Flavian asked him whether he meant thereby to say, that in his divinity he was consubstantial with the Father, and in his humanity with man, he replied, that he had delivered his answer. When further asked to express himself more clearly respecting the incarnation, he at length replied distinctly, that before the union there were two natures, subsequently but one.

The answer, thus extorted, was fully sufficient for the purpose which the synod had in view. He had no sooner

given it as the expression of his belief, than he was desired to curse it as profane. This he refused to do, establishing his plea on the writings of Cyril and Athanasius; and, after some time spent in fruitless attempts to procure his retractation, the sentence of excommunication was pronounced against him and all who might embrace his errors.

A new source of trouble was now opened; and it would be hazardous to say that good, of any kind, had been produced to act as an off-set to the evil. Eutyches had evidently only carried the doctrine of Cyril, which had so lately been declared the purest orthodoxy, to an extreme. So far, also, was he from being desirous of disturbing the peace of the church, that he used every means in his power to satisfy his adversaries, and even consented to modify some of his expressions to meet their views. In regard to the doctrine of the Trinity itself, he was clear and explicit; equally so was he in declaring his belief that Christ was both God and man, in the sense in which he had been said to be so by Athanasius, and the whole assembled church at the council of Nice. The object of the synod, therefore, was to make him explain himself into heresy; to unfold, as had been attempted in the Nestorian disputes, the most difficult of mysteries, and in unfolding them to speak, active, subtle, and powerful as his mind might be, only the language which they had set down for him. Still further, this synod could not be considered as representing the church, and therefore ought not to have pronounced on a matter of doctrine which concerned Christendom at large; nor could it be properly regarded as more than the representative of a party, glad to revive, under favourable circumstances, its attacks against one to which it had been obliged to succumb.

But Eutyches was not of a character, or in a situation, to tremble at the anathemas which had been pronounced against him. He appealed to the pope, he claimed the assistance of the emperor; and the sovereign forthwith

directed that the bishops in Constantinople should assemble to reconsider the matter. His orders were obeyed; and the synod, which consisted of prelates from various provinces, held its first sitting on the first of April, 449, and in the baptistery of the cathedral. Little, however, was done by this council; and the pope of Rome and the emperor agreed to call a more general one at Ephesus, during the approaching autumn. Both those august personages had begun to take a deep interest in the controversy. Leo, the founder of papal greatness and dominion, was a man whose talents equalled his ambition, and who, had it not been for his ambition, might have taken his place among the most valuable and eloquent defenders of the faith. The letter which Eutyches had sent him procured a reply strongly in favour of his acquittal from the charge of heresy. He could not see, Leo said, with what justice they had been able to condemn him; no breach of ancient doctrine appearing in his confession, and his offer to recant, if heresy could be proved against him, serving still further to nullify the accusations of his opponents.*

To this letter Flavian replied with great earnestness, and some strength of argument, setting forth the errors of Eutyches in the true spirit of a controversialist, and soliciting the assistance of Leo with the skill of a politician. His representations had the desired effect. Leo returned for answer, an exposition of his own system of belief, acknowledged that Eutyches had been justly condemned, and contented himself with merely expressing a desire that mercy should be shown him if he repented, and retracted his erroneous confession. In the council, which assembled according to the emperor's order at Ephesus, in the month of August, Eutyches again appeared, to answer the charge made against him by the large and influential party in the church so determined on his ruin. To the first questions put to him by the examiners, he distinctly replied, that the

* Baronius. Du Pin, Biblioth. Pat. Fleury, Hist. Ecclés. liv. xxvii. 23. The object of Leo is of course described with a different pen by Protestant and Catholic historians.

confession of faith which he then presented to them, and which contained the Nicene creed, was that which he should continue to make to his life's end ; that he would neither add to it nor alter it, and that he anathematised all heretics, from Simon Magus up to Nestorius. He then complained of the unfair manner in which the charge had been brought against him by Eusebius, on account of a personal dislike ; recounted the circumstances which had occurred at the synod in which he had been condemned ; and appealed from the partial judgment of Flavian to the unprejudiced decision of the present council.*

Few things tend more to give us an unfavourable idea of the state of the church at this period than the history of the Eutychian controversy. The president of the first council held at Ephesus was the determined opponent of the accused : the president of the second was his equally determined supporter : the consequence was, that in the one he was condemned, and in the other acquitted, the partiality in both cases being equally apparent. To the request which Flavian made, that Eusebius of Dorylæum might be admitted to repeat his charge, the president, Dioscorus, bishop of Alexandria, replied, that he had performed the office of accuser before the former judges, but that now the judges themselves were to answer for their proceedings. Not satisfied, therefore, with acquitting Eutyches, he persuaded the synod that both Flavian and Eusebius ought forthwith to be deposed. Several of the bishops joined him in this opinion ; and the condemnation of the two prelates was pronounced and signed. The most violent excitement reigned in the synod at the announcement of this measure. Many of those who had willingly opposed the decisions of the late council were by no means inclined to do more than exert their influence to rescind them. The power of the patriarch of Constantinople and his party was too great to be encountered

* See the remarks of Basnage (*Hist. de l'Eglise*) on general councils, liv. x. c. 1. Fleury, *Hist. Ecclés.*

without caution ; and, supported as his decision had been by the late favourable expressions of the pope, the timid naturally dreaded, that to condemn Flavian would be to draw down upon them the vengeance of a set of men whose enmity could not be too carefully avoided. Some of his associates, therefore, did not scruple to employ the most earnest entreaties to turn Dioscorus from his purpose, and even prostrated themselves at his feet, imploring him to retract the hasty sentence he had passed. Others openly protested against the proceeding, and while Flavian himself denounced the judge, boldly demanded his acquittal. But Dioscorus was resolved upon putting the measure into execution ; and in the midst of the confusion to which the proposal led, the prelates were alarmed by the entry of a body of guards, who, under the direction of the president, immediately proceeded to compel the members of the synod to give their signatures.

On the following day the council re-assembled ; and several other bishops, against whom charges were brought of having favoured the proceedings of Flavian, underwent a similar sentence of deposition. The gross violence and injustice of these measures were sufficient to disgust and alarm all men of sense and prudence ; but the subsequent conduct of Dioscorus was still more offensive to our notions of justice and Christian propriety. Pursuing the advantage he had gained over the man whom it was his object to humble, he expressed the utmost indignation on finding that Flavian had appealed to the pope, and obtained his protection. Instead of attending to the declaration of Leo, that the act of deposition was passed contrary to all the laws of equity, he hastened to complete the ruin of his victim before the measures intended for his relief could be confirmed. The edict by which he degraded him was followed by another, in which he condemned him to banishment ; and such was the disgraceful violence with which the decree was put in force, that the death of the unfortunate Flavian, which happened soon after, is supposed to have been

occasioned by the barbarities inflicted on him at his apprehension, and during his journey to the place of exile.

Leo received intelligence of the events which had taken place with surprise and indignation. His letter to the council had been treated with contempt, and his legates had with great difficulty escaped personal violence. In addressing the emperor, therefore, on the subject, he earnestly besought him to call a new council, and direct it to assemble in Italy, where it would be free from the overpowering influence of those factions which had destroyed the independence of the former synods. He expressed the same sentiments in another letter to the empress Pulcheria; and in all he wrote upon the subject insisted that none but a general council could with justice determine the affair. Theodosius replied to these appeals, by observing that, Flavian having been found guilty, he could not interfere any further. But Leo persevered in the design he had undertaken; and on the accession of Marcian found a new and powerful coadjutor to assist him in the completion of his views. That amiable and virtuous monarch is said to have been strongly biassed in favour of the bishops of Rome; and Leo was in every way a man calculated both to increase that prejudice in his favour, and to employ the advantage thus gained in the most profitable manner. It may not be amiss here to observe, that among the other circumstances favourable at this time to the increase of papal power, the state of the Eastern church must have been one of the most influential. No man of sense or piety could have beheld the confusion which reigned among its rulers, without a feeling sometimes of sorrow or indignation, but mostly of distrust. The dignity of the prelacy was destroyed by constant outbreaks of jealousy: the standard of faith was rendered doubtful by disputes, in which the declamations of personal prejudice were as predominant as syllogisms; and the church, which it had been the custom, according to the language of Scripture, to regard as one holy body composed of all the worshippers of

Christ, was torn by faction, while its members, separated from the head, lost their vitality, and forgot their origin. In the West, on the contrary, the superior authority of the bishop of Rome, which now began to be generally recognised, prevented the other prelates from disturbing the church, by setting themselves at the head of factions. If disputes arose, his influence was sufficient to make him the arbitrator; and having no equal in power, as the patriarch of Constantinople had, he was far less likely to favour doctrinal disputes from motives of pride or jealousy.

The superior condition which the western division of Christendom seemed to enjoy from these circumstances, naturally attracted the observation of the conscientious Marcian; and the legates whom Leo sent to his court were successful in obtaining a promise, that another council should be summoned without delay, in restoring the deposed bishops to their rank and dioceses, and procuring for the unfortunate Flavian an honourable burial in the church of the apostles. But Leo found all his influence insufficient to overcome the emperor's objections to holding the council in Italy; and, notwithstanding his wishes to the contrary, it was appointed to assemble at Nice on the first day of September. Thither several bishops, with the representatives of the pope, proceeded at the time specified; but a message was soon after sent by the emperor desiring them to attend him at Chalcedon, where he was detained by affairs which forbade his absence. Some apprehension was entertained by the prelates that the independence of their decisions might be endangered by this change, and that the Eutychians would derive from it an advantage which they could not have possessed at Nice. These fears, however, were removed by an encouraging letter from the emperor; and on the eighth day of October the session was opened in the cathedral of St. Euphemia by more than three hundred bishops, assembled chiefly from the various provinces of the East.*

* Evagrius, lib. ii. c. 4. Baronius. Du Pin, *Bibliot. Pat.* Councils in fifth century. Basnage.

This august council of the Christian church was attended by numerous officers of state, who occupied a central position near the altar. On their left appeared the pope's legates, the patriarch of Constantinople, the bishop of Antioch, and the other Eastern prelates according to the rank of their respective sees. On the right were ranged Dioscorus of Alexandria, the bishops of Palestine, and others from different parts of Illyria and Greece : in the midst lay the Gospel, the sacred depository of their faith, and an appeal to which, with perfect simplicity of heart and purpose, might have prevented so many of the outrages which had of late been committed against its precepts. A. D.
451

The very commencement of the session was disgraced by tumult. Theodoretus *, an object of hatred to the Egyptians, and of proportionate admiration to the Eastern party, was no sooner named by the latter, than their opponents prohibited his appearance with exclamations so violent, that the ministers of the emperor found themselves obliged to interfere, and in doing so reproved the bishops with acting in a manner which ill became their character and office. Silence being restored, the business of the meeting was begun ; and by the first act of the synod the proceedings of Dioscorus at Ephesus were declared unjust and iniquitous.

During the five following sittings of the council, the bishop of Alexandria was formally judged and deposed : the letter of Leo to Flavian, in which he expounded the doctrine of the church, was read and examined ; and, lastly, the regular confessions of faith having been carefully considered, it was determined that the above-mentioned epistle of Leo, and those of Cyril, should be added to the creeds of Nice and Ephesus, as expositions of the mystery, which yet they leave unexplained, of the hypostatic union. In summing up their decisions, therefore, in respect to doctrine, the synod declared its belief to be, that Jesus Christ was perfect both in his divinity and in his humanity ; that he was consubstantial with the Father, according to the divinity ; consubstantial with us, and

* He was bishop of Cyrus, and the writer of the works quoted above.

in all things like us, except sin, according to the humanity ; that he was eternally begotten of the Father, according to the divinity, and in the last times, born of the Virgin Mary, mother of God, according to the humanity, for us, and for our salvation ; that he was one and the same Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, Lord in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, without the difference in the two natures being destroyed by the union : that, on the contrary, the proper nature of each was preserved and combined in one single person, or in one single hypostasis, so that he was not divided into two persons, but was one and the same only begotten Son, God the word, our Lord Jesus Christ. Whosoever, it was added, taught or believed contrary to this, should, if in holy orders, be deposed, if a monk or layman, be anathematised.

When the members of the synod had thus settled the doctrinal questions proposed for their consideration, Marcian, who was not present till the sixth day, addressed the fathers, and professed his devout intention of following the example of Constantine, and employing his best means for the preservation of the faith. The confession which had been drawn up was then read to him ; and the bishops having again declared their assent to its several articles, concluded by requesting that he would now dismiss them to their dioceses. Their attention, however, was further required for the settlement of some points of discipline. The sentences of several deposed bishops were re-examined, and many new canons established to meet the growing corruptions of the age. Among these regulations we find it ordained, that no ecclesiastical person should hire farms, or engage in worldly occupations ; that no person should be ordained without a positive presentation to some church ; that no clergyman should hold two churches at one time, that to which he was ordained, and that to which he was removed ; and that those who did should be obliged to return to their first church, or if they re-

mained in the benefice to which they were last presented, that they should receive none of the revenues of that which they had left.

The solemnity with which this council had been assembled, and the authority conferred on it by the united influence of the emperor and the pope, gave a weight to its decisions which had been wanting to those previously convened. But the prudence and wisdom which characterise several of its decrees, and the comparative clearness with which its doctrinal statements are drawn up, only served to excite the bigoted of either faction to oppose its acts with the more determined obstinacy. In Alexandria the intelligence of the deposition of Dioscorus, who had been sent to Gangra, in Paphlagonia, was received with marks of the most tumultuous displeasure. The populace loudly demanded his restitution, and refused, with corresponding vehemence, to accept Proterius, who had been appointed to the see by the common suffrages of the synod. To such a degree of violence did they at length proceed, that the magistrates found themselves obliged to send a body of soldiers against them. The whole force, however, they could muster was insufficient to resist the inflamed multitude; the soldiers fled to the temple of Serapis, which they fortified in the best manner they were able, but were pursued thither by their furious assailants, who set fire to the building, and left them to perish in the flames. Tidings being sent to the emperor respecting the state of the city, additional troops were despatched to quell the tumults; but it was not till after fresh scenes of disgraceful licentiousness had taken place on both sides, that peace was even partially restored.* Similar disturbances prevailed in Palestine, and other parts of the East; and no sooner had these exhibitions of popular excitement ceased, than the busy spirits, to whom the church was an arena for mental gladiatorship, resumed their wonted operations. The death of Marcian gave greater scope to their machinations. So little

* Evagrius, Hist. lib. ii, c. 5.

was the sanctity of the episcopal character regarded at this time, that a popular favourite, Timotheus Ælurus, burst into the church where Proterius was officiating at the sacrament, and received consecration from two bishops whom he carried with him for that purpose, and who had both been deposed by the sentence of the council. The unfortunate Proterius, having ample reason to dread the violence of his enemies, had fled, on their entrance, into the baptistery, where he hoped to be safe from sacrilegious intrusion. But he was closely followed by a party of implacable ruffians, and fell, with several of his friends, beneath the knife of the assassin. His dead body was regarded as a fit object for the exercise of that intense hatred with which he had been viewed when living. It was dragged through the streets, presented in triumph to the people; and, having been thus exhibited, was almost torn into shreds, the most furious of the multitude not refusing, it is said, like wild beasts, to taste his entrails.* It was not till the year 482 that the church of Alexandria ceased to feel the direst effects of these disorders. At that time Mongus, a favourer of the Eutychian doctrine, after having long struggled with the opposite party, was established in the see, and restored the Egyptians to their former pre-eminence as followers of Eutyches.

Mongus owed his elevation, in great part, to the influence of Acacius, the patriarch of Constantinople; and about the same time that he was placed over the church of Alexandria, that of Antioch was consigned, through the same influence, to the care of Peter, surnamed the Fuller. This celebrated schismatic was originally a monk, and in that capacity had exercised the occupation whence he received his appellation of Fullo. He appears to have been a man of acute mind, but more enthusiastic than learned, and far more devoted to the propagation of his particular views than interested in preserving entire the weighty interests of the church at large. Not satisfied, moreover, with opposing the council of Chalcedon, from

* Evagrius, lib. ii. c. 8.

the general principles of his party, he rejected its decrees with a violence which carried him beyond the most bigoted of his sect. To the celebrated hymn to the Trinity, known by the name of the Trisagium, he added the clause, "Who hast suffered for us on the cross," and proclaimed an anathema against all who should refuse to say, that God was crucified. Neither Eutyches nor Nestorius had ventured on adopting the language proper to their peculiar dogmas, without taking the utmost care to explain their expressions in a manner which prevented their interfering with the Catholic doctrines of the Nicene creed. But Fullo was far less cautious; and he boldly assumed for himself, and for his sect, the title of Theopaschites, or believers in the sufferings of God. In the East, his addition to the hymn was, after a short time, generally adopted; but the pope, and the church in the West, resisted him with all the vigour which was to be expected from the chief supporters of the council of Chalcedon. Such, also, was the fashion of the times in ecclesiastical matters, that no two parties could be opposed to each other without each pretending to an authority which might place it in judgment over its adversaries. Thus, Fullo, in the year 484, was formally condemned and deposed, and that for the fifth time, in the court of the bishop of Rome.* By the same sentence, also, were deposed the patriarchs of Constantinople and Alexandria; and the whole Eastern church was, in a great measure, already subjected to the dominion of the Roman see. When, moreover, the part which Leo took in the late council is considered, and the reception of his epistle as a portion of the ecclesiastical canon, the clearest indication is afforded us of the rapid strides which papal authority was taking, and of the speedy advancement of its possessors to the seat of monarchy in the church.

But neither anathemas, nor counter-confessions of faith; neither fear of any power in the church, nor regard for its peace or the extension of the kingdom of God, could

* A full account is given of this schismatic by Valesius at the end of the third volume of his edition of Eusebius, &c.

tranquillise the angry spirit which was busily transfusing its venom throughout Christendom. Followers of Eutyches and Nestorius were now to be found in all parts of the world ; nor did distance of time or place make any difference in the temper with which their dogmas were embraced or upheld. The decree of union, or Henoticon, which the emperor Zeno issued, was subscribed by the three chiefs of the Eutychian party, Acacius, Mongus, and Fullo: but a large body of the sect professed great indignation at this approach to conciliation; and the Monophysites*, as they began to term themselves, were thence divided into numerous subsects, each of which took a name, as Anthropomorphites, Esaianists, &c. suited to their particular views.

Happily for mankind, the niceties of exposition, in which the controversialists of Constantinople and Alexandria found the subject-matter of their dogmas, are little calculated to interest the human intellect in its ordinary state of health and sobriety. But the factious feeling, which had been engendered by the original discussion, continued to spread from one mind to another ; and, as is the case with other controversies, there were Nestorians and Eutychians, when they who bore the names knew no other cause for their hatred to each other but that they bore those names. After all the endeavours which have been made to fix the mark of infamy on Nestorius and Eutyches, they seem to have been less in fault than most of those who came to oppose or defend them. Dupin has observed, that the former of these celebrated men would have merited the title of saint, had it not been for his heretical opinion ; he might have said, with far greater truth, if it had not been for the haughty and persecuting spirit he showed before he was persecuted himself. But neither he nor Eutyches has any charge laid against him like those which throw so dark a shade over the fame of Cyril. The conduct of that prelate, at the first council which sat in judgment on Nestorius,

* A unity of nature is intended to be expressed by this term ; and those who followed the extreme principles of Eutyches, considered that they led directly to this conclusion.

was distinguished by a violence and unfairness which the simplest sentiment of justice makes us view with disgust. In this he was too closely imitated by numerous other prelates ; and the thin veil which their pretended zeal for the purity of the faith threw over their private malice, their turbulent ambition, and unholy love of disputation, conceals neither the deformity of their conduct, nor the baseness of their motives.

Had we not so melancholy a picture before us, we might have rightly felt inclined to praise the care with which the best intellects of the age laboured in the cause of Christian truth. We might have lamented that they were employed in endeavouring to explain things inexplicable, except as the Holy Spirit explains them by faith, but we could not, without satisfaction, have found that the doctrines of the gospel so entirely occupied men's minds, that to explain them was the business of the most learned, and to hear them explained, the most important occupation of life. There would have been ample reason, in short, for our assenting to the remarks of the ancient historian, who, in seeking an excuse for these dissensions, observes, that the Gentiles ought not to suppose they had found any fair reason for ridiculing the Christians, because each new generation of bishops added something to the confessions of faith, for that such was almost a necessary consequence of the diligence they employed in investigating the indescribable and inexplicable benevolence of God.*

But the preceding sketch of the events to which these disputes led affords a strong commentary on the words of Evagrius, and goes far to prove, that if any of the controversialists alluded to were simply influenced by a love of enquiry and speculation, they were Nestorius and Eutyches themselves. The former began his proceedings by defending one of his clergy whom he considered unjustly accused of heresy, because he declaimed against the use of a phrase which, if it were intended to convey any idea, is presumptuous, and even impious ;

• Evagrius, lib. i. xi.

and if it implies none, ought certainly not to have been retained, to mar the simplicity of Christian doctrine and exhortation. For this he was arraigned before the tribunal of his known rival and enemy — was deposed, confined in a monastery, then sent into the solitudes of a desert, and at last hurried from one corner of the country to another, till he perished of fatigue. Eutyches was forced into contention in a still more unjust manner; and it ought never to be forgotten that both he and Nestorius willingly offered many concessions to their adversaries for the sake of restoring tranquillity. It has been rightly observed, by the learned and temperate Le Clerc, how much better would it have been to have adhered to the expressions which are found in Scripture, without introducing new terms.* But the accusers of the supposed heretics obstinately resisted every attempt they made to express their opinions in the language of Scripture; and, with an imprudence which was only to be exceeded by their want of charity, resolved to make men schismatics against their will. The uselessness of the controversy, its little connection with the real doctrines of redemption, and its utter want of any practical importance, have now been long acknowledged. One eminent theologian after another has remarked, that it was a war of words; that it was scarcely possible to oppose the error of Nestorius without falling into that of Eutyches, or of confuting Eutyches without becoming a Nestorian; and that some of the writers, consequently, who have endeavoured to defend the church against their heresies, have rather exhibited them in opposition than confuted them!†

When the controversy, therefore, was left without support from the personal enmities of the several disputants, it ceased to engage attention, and the poison which had been sown during its continuance was speedily rendered innoxious by the antidote which simple reason supplied.

* Le Clerc, *Bibl. A. et M.* xxviii. 265. † *Hist. du Chris. des Indes*, p. 23.

CHAP. IX.

HERESY OF PELAGIUS. — OPPOSED BY JUSTIN AND AUGUSTINE. —
DOCTRINES OF THE LATTER.

WHILE the eastern division of Christendom was thus torn with schisms which threatened the immediate overthrow of the church, and were then forgotten, a heresy of a different nature, and having in itself a better chance of continuance, was planted in the West, and soon after took so deep a root as to defy the efforts of the most vigorous and enlightened minds to prevent its propagation. The author of the system here alluded to was the monk Pelagius, a native of Wales, whose original name was Morgan, which, following the fashion of the times, he translated into the more classical appellation by which he is known in history. The main principles in his system were the perfectibility of human nature, the meritorious efficacy of good works, and the sufficiency of human strength to fulfil the appointments of God. At the time he began to teach these doctrines, he had been long distinguished for piety and talent; and those who opposed his errors lamented them as the wanderings of a man who had nearly approached the termination of a holy and useful life. It appears, however, that, almost immediately after he imbibed the notions on which his system is founded, he made an extensive tour through Egypt; and, having visited the principal monasteries in that country, returned into Europe, and took up his residence at Rome. In his journey, as well as in his labours, he was accompanied by an associate named Celestius, said by some to have been a native of Ireland, by others of Scotland, and by some of Italy. But in the sack of Rome by the Goths, during the year 410, they were both obliged to make a precipitate flight, and sought refuge in Sicily. They thence passed into Africa; and,

on their arrival in that country, Pelagius took up his temporary abode at Hippo, the see of the celebrated Augustine, while Celestius proceeded to Carthage, where he in vain sought to be admitted to the rank of presbyter. His principal opponent was a deacon named Paulinus, through whose influence he was arraigned before a council, and, instead of being promoted, was obliged to answer for his conduct as a heretic. The principal question put to him was, whether he acknowledged the doctrine of original sin? to which he replied in the negative, adding, that several members of the church considered that children are not born sinners, but in the same state as Adam was before he fell. Opinions so contrary to Scripture and the doctrines of the church could not, consistently with the now established usage of its rulers, pass unpunished, and Celestius was accordingly excommunicated.

Pelagius, in the mean time, had rendered himself equally conspicuous at Hippo ; but, in pursuance of the objects with which his mind was wholly occupied, he soon after proceeded to Palestine, where he was received with many marks of distinction by John of Jerusalem. But a similar fate attended him there as that which had so lately obliged his companion to leave Carthage. His name and writings were well known to persons then residing in Palestine ; and in July, 415, he was summoned to Diospolis, to give an account of his opinions before a synod assembled for that purpose at the instance of Drosius, a Spanish priest, and the intimate associate of Augustine. With him were united two bishops from Gaul ; and at the head of the council, which consisted altogether of fourteen prelates, was Eulogius of Cæsarea. The assembly, however, met, under circumstances little calculated, it appears, to elicit truth, on whichever side it lay. Of the three accusers, only one was present : the members of the council were but very imperfectly acquainted with the subject of dispute ; and the whole influence of the bishop of Jerusalem was exerted to silence the charge. Pelagius ac-

cordingly obtained a full acquittal ; but he was not allowed to indulge, undisturbedly, in his supposed triumph. His career had been carefully watched by two men, whose talents and dispositions were alike calculated to make them his adversaries, and the successful opponents of his doctrines. These were the ardent-minded and uncompromising Jerome, and the meditative, eloquent Augustine. The former of these eminent fathers was born at Strigonium, about the year 345 ; and, having acquired a profound knowledge of languages and general literature, proceeded to Rome, where he received baptism as a member of the church. His love of learning, and distaste for the world, induced him to visit various provinces of the East, in search of quiet and independence. He passed some time in the deserts of Syria ; then took up his residence at Antioch, where he was ordained priest ; and finally settled himself in the little town of Bethlehem, where he inhabited a cell that might be considered the origin of the monastic institutions in that place. Jerome, besides attacking Pelagius with his pen, sent a complaint respecting his conduct, and that of his followers, to the bishop of Rome ; but it was to Augustine that the Christian world was indebted for the principal defence of its doctrines against the inroads of the new opinions. This great and eloquent man was born at Tagasta, in Numidia, about the year 354. His youth was spent in the study of rhetoric, which he subsequently taught both in his native place and at Carthage. He then visited Rome, and, during his stay there, obtained an appointment to the professorship of rhetoric at Milan. The discourses of Ambrose led to his conversion from the Manichean errors, which he had hitherto upheld ; and he thenceforth applied himself to the study of Scripture with an ardour which at length rendered him one of the most biblical of writers. On returning to Carthage, his united genius and piety secured him the universal respect of the African prelates, and he was appointed coadjutor to the bishop of Hippo. Augustine's whole system rested on

the very article of evangelical theology which it was the object of Pelagius to overthrow.* His religious experience had taught him to value it as the foundation of his hope. Every time he looked back to the period of his conversion he felt for it a more intense veneration: it was intermingled with all the most powerful of his sentiments; inspired those fervent feelings of devout gratitude which breathe in every page of his writings, and was as the key by which the gospel had opened the recesses of his heart to all its vivifying influences.

No sooner, therefore, had the decision of the late council become generally known, than Augustine commenced his energetic attack on the errors of Pelagius. He was but just returned from Carthage, where he had been actively engaged with the Donatists, when he entered on this new controversy. His first writings on the subject consisted of two treatises addressed to the tribune Marcellinus, then at Carthage, and carefully setting forth the views of the church on the remission of sins, and the consequences of infant baptism. These were followed by several other works of a similar tendency, of which it may be advisable to give in an abstract a general view, the arguments employed by Augustine on this most important controversy exhibiting the chief and leading features of his theology. God, he says, created the first man innocent, and full of holiness and grace, and, therefore, subject neither to death nor sickness, neither to pain nor the influence of evil passions. His free-will, which existed in full strength, was indifferent to do either good or evil, and though divine grace was necessary to his following the former, it was subject to his free-will, and, therefore, did not compel him to the acts which it might assist him to perform. This would have been the perpetual condition not only of Adam but of all his posterity, had he not fallen; but with sin came death, and the consequences of corruption—evil thoughts, base passions, fear, and misery. The sin of Adam is

* See Tillemont (whose account of this father is eminently full and particular), Dupin, and Fleury.

also the sin of his race. All who descend from him are born in sin; and thus, by birth and nature, stand exposed to divine wrath and condemnation. This original sin, as it is termed, is only to be removed by baptism, which regenerates him who receives it, through the merits of Christ, taking away the stain, but not, it is argued, the punishment or consequences of sin. The free-will, which had been so perfect before the fall, was not destroyed thereby, but only greatly weakened, and now requires, therefore, much more copious supplies of divine grace to make it desire that which is good—of that grace without which, not the first step in the life of righteousness can be taken. But notwithstanding this, grace is not to be considered as destroying our liberty, but as only working in us the will to act aright, God leading no one to do either well or ill by compulsion. This grace, moreover, is to be considered as in every way the free, unmerited gift of divine mercy; and since the whole world stands condemned through the sin of Adam, the salvation of any of the individuals who compose it is to be regarded as an exercise of this free grace on the part of God, who thereby delivers those whom he will, while the rest are left in the state of condemnation they have inherited by nature. That God is not to be accused of injustice or unmercifulness, on account of this dispensation, is said to be manifest from the consideration, that the grace which he freely gives to any he might without injustice deny to all: that the earthen vessel may not say to the potter, *Why hast thou made me thus?* and that, in fact, there are certain favours which he bestows on all men, which might lead them to repentance if they would, but which they perseveringly resist, and so confirm their condemnation by their own obstinacy. In respect to the effects of this grace, it is described as making us love whatever is good, and hate whatever is evil;—as the only principle whereby our actions can be rendered meritorious, and as having an efficacy whereby man might be rendered, if he would wholly yield himself to its influence, altogether free from sin.

Such are the main points of doctrine on which Augustine insisted in his controversy with Pelagius; and however many individuals may be inclined to differ with him in respect to the doctrine of election and reprobation, few will fail to perceive that his system, on the whole, is consistent not only with Scripture, but with all that experience has taught us of the present nature of man. The writer of these volumes would be cautious in speaking on a subject which has engaged the attention of the most erudite and pious men in every age of the church, and who have embraced, and exercised the whole strength of their talents to defend, the unabridged system of Augustine. But it would seem that he drew consequences from the truly scriptural doctrine of free grace to which it does not necessarily lead, or, at least, that he speculated theoretically upon a doctrine which ought to be only meditated upon practically. That children dying without baptism are to be accounted among the reprobate, or those condemned to everlasting misery, is a tenet which may certainly be derived from Augustine's system, but only as that system branches out beyond the limits of scriptural revelation. The whole doctrine of reprobation, indeed, appears to have originated from the supposition, that the decrees of mercy must necessarily have a parallel and opposite in decrees of wrath,—a supposition which the passages adduced in its support from Scripture seem very insufficient to confirm. To say that God gives such abundant supplies of grace to some, that they are, as it were, necessitated to repent, and love righteousness, but that, as he does not thus especially favour all, some are therefore left for eternal condemnation, is manifestly false in reason, unless it were known that man could not be brought to repentance without the dispensation of grace necessary to make it certain; or that God, by choosing some to be as vessels of glory in his house, was necessitated to cast away the rest, not as vessels made for a less honourable service, but as unformed clay, that had never felt the pressure of his hand. The tenour of Scripture, in fact, even in those portions which are apparently most favour-

able to this doctrine, seems strongly to oppose it when carefully considered. In all those instances of election especially left on record, those who enjoyed that blessing appear to have received it not for themselves merely, but for those who had no part in the election. The Jews were an elect people ; but God had respect to the world at large in their election, and chose them from the mass, because it was only by his so doing that the system of salvation could be carried on. The call of Abraham had doubtless a reference to this purpose ; and, in later days, the instances of personal election present the same features, and have obviously a reference to the same object. Prophets and apostles were separated from their birth, to exhibit in themselves the power of God's grace ; they overcame by that grace all the enemies of their own salvation ; perfected righteousness in their words and actions, and acquired, through its power, the crowns of glory laid up for them in heaven : but it was not for themselves simply that they received this grace to which they owed their salvation ; it was given them that they might be preachers of righteousness ; and it appears consistent with the general economy of grace to believe, that in all the instances where God, by the might of his Spirit, has rendered men extraordinarily devoted to his service, he has converted them as well for the sake of those who were not the objects of such especial grace as for the sake of the elect themselves. Under this view of the subject, the doctrine of election is not simply no contradiction to divine justice, but is, in the largest sense, a most affecting demonstration of heavenly mercy. Not only is a blessing bestowed upon certain individuals of our race, which manifests the love of God in the strongest light, but this same blessing is destined to be a most powerful means of grace to others. Like the light which renders the sun glorious as its first recipient, it is not to remain within its receptacle, but to diffuse animation through a circle, or like a river, which not only bestows fertility on its own banks, but, by the dews which rise from its surface, enriches many a field and valley which its waters reach not. Elec-

tion, moreover, thus considered, is so far from leading to the idea that it is counterbalanced by reprobation, that it evidently confirms and illustrates the doctrine so often insisted upon in Scripture, that God desires the salvation of all men, that Christ died for all, that the sinner is the sole cause of his own condemnation, and that the grace and providence of God are ever conjointly employed, in inviting not some, but all men to repentance. In the same manner, the elect, thus regarded, are not taken from, and elevated above, their fellow-creatures, like beings who are thenceforth to have no connection with them, no sympathy, no common object of pursuit, but are raised like the sons of a gracious parent, who, seeing some of his children more likely than the others to employ his favours well, chooses them from the rest; and, while he bestows the inheritance on them, charges them to watch, like guardians, over their weaker and erring brethren.

But to resume our narrative. Neither the exertions of Augustine, nor those of other eminent men of the church, availed at first to stop the progress of the Pelagian errors. Zosimus, the new pope*, convinced or deceived by the reasoning of Pelagius and his companion Celestius, espoused their cause; and, in opposition to the council of Carthage, which met in the year 416, and a second time condemned them, pronounced an opinion that they had been unjustly accused. Other councils were held in Africa about the same period, and with similar results. Augustine and Jerome laboured with increasing activity in their opposition to the heretics, and, either by their presence or their letters, confirmed the African church in its zealous attachment to the orthodox and established opinions. But in the West, the contest was mixed up with considerations on the part of the pope which turned the balance in favour of Pelagius and Celestius. Zosimus was sufficient politician to perceive that, if he were recognised as arbiter in the controversy, he might considerably advance his authority and influence over the

* Bassage, *Hist. de l'Eglise*, liv. xi. c. 10. Fleury, *Hist. Ecclés.* liv. xxiii. 42.

distant provinces of Christendom. With this idea, he took upon himself to examine Celestius, who had returned to Rome, and then summoned his accusers to appear within two months, and support their charge. As the summons was not attended to, he fully acquitted both Celestius and Pelagius; but the firm conduct of the African prelates obliged him to pause in the course he had intended to follow. Though affirming, with an appearance of confidence, that his decision in a matter of controversy ought to be regarded as final, he consented, he said, to communicate with them on the subject, and, in accordance with this conciliatory spirit, soon after summoned Celestius again to appear before him. But Celestius was aware of the change which had taken place in the pope's opinion, and, instead of obeying the citation, made a hasty retreat from Rome. Irritated at this, Zosimus confessed that he had been deceived, and without delay pronounced an anathema against the whole system of Pelagius and his associate. Both the East and the West were now in arms against the new heresy; and wherever its authors endeavoured to establish themselves, host of opponents were prepared to assail them.

Pelagianism was by these means speedily deprived of the vigour which had threatened to unsettle the faith of the church. But though its opponents rejoiced, and with reason, that they had so soon gained a triumph over the innovators, and stifled their system in its birth, the controversy left long and deep traces of its effects. A modified species of Pelagianism sprang up, and the doctrines of the gospel were imperceptibly lowered by the rationalising spirit which was beginning to prevail among a numerous body of the clergy. In the conflict of two opposite sects, the extremes only of their systems are observed; and it is on these which the spirit of partisanship teaches their respective adherents to fasten with the greatest pertinacity. But it is in the extremes of systems that error chiefly abounds; and, as it is only in proportion to the

quantity of truth in opinions that they can be brought into connection, that which is peculiar to the systems which have been the subject of controversy will generally be found to retain its hold on men's minds long after the dispute has apparently been brought to a close. Hence the readiness with which the opinions of the monk Cassian were received. That religionist, rejecting the opinions of Pelagius, propagated others, which embodied the most objectionable principle of the late heresy. While he denied that man could perfect the renovation of his soul by any efforts of his own, he maintained, that to himself belonged the beginning of the work. This idea was rapidly propagated in the church, and has continued through many succeeding ages to endanger the purity of its doctrines.

Augustine, on the other hand, by endeavouring to unfold the mysteries of divine grace with too ardent a mind, had imbued his opinions with the warmth of his own devotion, which, when taken by others as the substance and foundation of argumentation, drew them at once into a labyrinth of contradictions. But profound humility, an anxious desire to give glory to God—to overcome every feeling of selfishness—to destroy all dependence on resolutions unassisted by divine grace—on motives which have not their beginning in the renewal of the heart, or on hopes which centre not in the Author and Finisher of our salvation;—these were the characteristics not only of Augustine's system, but of those which at first sprung from it. Unfortunately, the deceitfulness of the human heart soon taught men to discover, that the principles which were intended to cherish the deepest spirit of holiness might furnish the most subtle arguments for the indulgence of licentiousness. The Predestinarians drew consequences from Augustine's system which he himself shrunk from with horror. The crimes of the wicked, as well as the virtues of the holy, were ascribed by those sectaries to the decrees of God; and though, by his strenuous opposition to their error, it was somewhat repressed the

subsequent history of religion affords many a melancholy proof that tares had been sown, which none but the great Husbandman himself could separate from the wheat.

CHAP. X.

REVIVAL OF THE EUTYCHIANS UNDER THE EMPEROR ANASTASIUS. — THE REIGNS OF JUSTIN, JUSTINIAN, AND THEIR SUCCESSORS. — DISORDERS IN THE CHURCH. — LABOURS OF GREGORY; OF BENEDICT; OF AUGUSTINE.

THE preceding century was closed amid disputes which went near to subvert that lofty fabric of ecclesiastical power and discipline which had been reared by the united labours of emperors and churchmen. To trace the continuation of the same troubles is still the melancholy task of the historian. Heresy opposed by heresy — faction by ambition — ignorance by dogmatism — prelatical pride by the incipient strength of papal tyranny, — from the conflict of such combatants as these, Piety has little to look for, and Truth, finding herself despised, voluntarily abandons the field. But the inference which a careless reader of history would draw from the narrative of these disorders is not that to which it ought properly to lead. There is a species of idolatry which owes its invention chiefly to modern philosophy, and having derived its birth from the sophistry of acute minds is received with admiration by the weak and obtuse. Taking the pride, the hate and jealousy, the ambition and licentiousness of evil men professing Christianity, the enemies of truth have formed a kind of Juggernaut of their vices, and, audaciously declaring, that it may be looked at as an abstraction of the religion — that it may be spoken of as synonymous with the

faith itself—that the wars it has excited, the bloody sacrifices it has demanded, are to be considered as its own,—turn round in triumph, and ask, whether it ought to be received and obeyed as divine?

But instead of being rendered doubtful, as to the truth or holiness of Christianity, from a close survey of the errors of its professors, the attentive enquirer will rise from the examination more strongly convinced than ever of its divine origin. The most simple process of reasoning will force him to acknowledge, that no system which uniformly teaches the worth of peace, humility, and kind-heartedness, can be fairly regarded as the cause of pride and contention. A similar process will convince him, that a system which could maintain its ground through centuries of ever-varying dispute, must have had something in its nature singularly vivifying: and when he comes to consider that every species of error, which was from time to time attached to it, fell off at a subsequent period, not as the husk from a ripe fruit, but as a worm which had in vain endeavoured to penetrate the rind, he will conclude that error has nothing in common with the system, that they are essentially opposite in their nature, and that the religion which has been so often confounded with the false schemes of its professors is derived immediately from heaven.

The emperor Anastasius was zealously attached to the Eutychians, and more especially to that branch of the sect which had assumed the title of Acephali, or the headless, from their being without a leader. But on his ascending the throne, to which he was raised by his marriage with Ariadne, the widow of the late emperor, the bishop Euphemius is said to have refused to anoint him till he signed a declaration, that he would do nothing prejudicial to the Catholic faith. This declaration, with the emperor's signature in his own handwriting, was given in charge to Macedonius, who had the care of the sacred vessels; but when that ecclesiastic was promoted to the see, Ana-

stasius employed every means in his power to obtain possession of the document to which he had put his hand. This, however, the new bishop boldly resisted; and Anastasius, in revenge, used the most strenuous exertions to deprive him of his dignity. A furious conflict was thus again excited. Accusations of the basest kind, and wholly devoid of truth, were preferred against Macedonius, who was at length compelled to resign, and driven into exile. The bishops of Antioch and Jerusalem were subjected to a similar treatment; and the place of the former was supplied by Severus, a monk of Palestine, whose learning and ambition exalted him at once into a leader of the Monophysites.*

The rest of the emperor's proceedings were in conformity with these instances of violence; and the orthodox, every where oppressed and degraded, conceived themselves justified in seeking relief by opposing force to force. The pope refused to espouse their cause, till they should agree to the personal condemnation of Acacius; but Vitalian, the Gothic chief, had no conditions to impose, and his victorious arms quickly obliged the terrified Anastasius to promise the toleration of his orthodox subjects. Hormisdas, the reigning pope, was now appealed to: his legates were admitted to a conference with the emperor; and the Christian world had reason to expect that tranquillity would be the result. But the pontiff still insisted upon the unqualified condemnation of Acacius; and, after two unsuccessful negotiations, the emperor, more irritated than ever, prepared for fresh acts of oppression. Before, however, he could take his measures, Constantinople was filled with a band of near 10,000 monks, who, with Sabas and Theodosius at their head, declared to him, that they venerated the acts of the four councils as they did the four Gospels. Anastasius was at the same time threatened with a renewal of hostilities on the part of Vitalian, and his councils were thus for awhile disturbed by apprehensions which his sectarian zeal was not sufficient to suppress. His

* Evagrius, *Hist. Eccles.* l. iii. c. 33, 34.

death took place in the year 518, and gave the orthodox hopes of a more permanent tranquillity than they could have looked for under his reign.

Justin*, the successor of Anastasius, was as determined an enemy of the Monophysites as the late emperor had been their friend. The first acts of his reign were the restoration of the banished bishops, and the solemn confirmation of the council of Chalcedon. His attachment to the orthodox, however, was happily not followed by the consequences which might have been expected from the situation of the two parties. Weary with contention, the Monophysites offered little resistance to his measures; but the pope still insisted on the condemnation of Acacius: and this is one of the most striking proofs afforded in the early history of the church, of the haughty and resolute spirit which animated, from the commencement of their tyranny, the Roman pontiffs.

The death of Justin occurred in 527, and was preceded by an earthquake, which caused the total destruction of Antioch, in the ruins of which city was buried the patriarch Euphrasius.† Justinian, who succeeded the late emperor, prided himself on his knowledge of theology, and was so firm an upholder of the most austere rules of discipline, that he received the appellation of the "Faster." His regulations respecting the residence of bishops afford at the same time a clear indication of the corruptions which existed in the church, and evidence that he was well aware of the means which should be employed to improve the moral and religious state of its members. "Let the metropolitans of your province know," said he to the patriarch of Constantinople, "that neither they, nor the bishops under them, can be suffered to visit this city on any pretence whatever, without our especial order; and that, if they have any affairs to transact, they must send hither one or two of their clergy to acquaint us with their desires."

But it would have required an almost superhuman

* Evagrius, lib. iv. c. 1.

† Ibid. c. 5.

energy and wisdom to produce even an appearance of regularity or discipline in the church, torn as it was with heresy and schism. Alexandria was still the scene of the most deplorable discord; and Justinian, exercising his skill in theology, drew up a profession of faith, which he vainly hoped might bring the several factions into union. In his anxiety to effect this desirable object, he sought the assistance of the pope; and it is well worthy of observation, that he styles him, in his epistle, the chief of all the bishops. His efforts, however, were of little avail. The Eutychians were subdivided into too many parties to be held together by any creed or compact; and while multiplying dissensions on the first principles of their sect, sought, and that without fear of failure, a new province of dispute. A certain number of them, thinking that they discovered some resemblance between their system and the opinions of Origen, warmly proclaimed their attachment to that eminent father; and their sentiments on this point being opposed by others of the party with corresponding vigour, Origenism and anti-Origenism became as frequently the watchwords of contention, as a short time before had been the names of Nestorius and Eutyches. Justinian himself at first strongly opposed, then favoured, the Origenists; and the interest he took in the establishment of their opinions led him to the commission of acts as impolitic as they were unjust. Death only prevented him from deposing every bishop who ventured to contradict him on the subject of the incarnation, and the incorruptibility of Christ's body. A constant agitation was thus kept up from one corner of the East to the other; and the various doctrines of the several parties were received with belief or reprobation, according to the political skill or cunning of their supporters. Thus it was that Theodorus, the bishop of Cæsarea, won over the emperor to cease from persecuting the disciples of Origen, and turn his whole force against the Nestorians. By an edict, of the tendency of which he seems not to have been fully aware, he formally condemned

those writings of Theodorus of Mopsuestia, of Theodoretus of Cyrus, and of Ibas of Edessa, which were supposed to embody the principal tenets of the party, and were technically known by the title of the "Three Chapters." In order to do this, he had to condemn, by way of preliminary, those determinations of the council of Chalcedon by which they had been placed among productions illustrating the rule of faith.

No sooner was this edict published, than Vigilius, who had been raised to the pontifical throne by the intrigues of the empress Theodora, and the authority of the celebrated Belisarius, loudly expressed his opposition to the measure. He was supported by the bishops of Africa as well as by those of the West; but Justinian, who appears to have had little respect for either his authority or his character, called him to Constantinople, and, after obliging him to sanction the edict, which was republished in 551, summoned about two years afterwards a synod, which is considered by ecclesiastical historians as the fifth in the list of general councils. But Vigilius had by this time either materially changed his opinions, or had acquired a higher sense of his authority; for he now refused to subscribe the condemnation of the three chapters, nor could be persuaded to give his assent, till exile and a long series of vexatious oppressions obliged him to submit.

The reign of Justinian was rendered by these occurrences far less propitious to the church than it might have been expected to prove, from the many excellent qualities of his character. In several of his ordinances he manifested the wisdom of a just and prudent legislator. The code of laws known by his name was compiled under his immediate orders and inspection: his view of the duties which belonged to the several degrees of the clergy was well-founded and discreet; and the resolute manner in which he opposed the growing pride of the Roman pontiff, evinced a degree of penetration superior to that possessed either by his immediate predecessors or his successors. The triumph of

his arms, moreover, under Narses, and the consequent expulsion of the Goths from Italy, shed a lustre over his reign, which, though evanescent, was well calculated to increase his authority, and enable him to carry his designs into execution with a bolder hand. How was it then, it is natural to ask, that Justinian effected so little for the solid good of the church? The only proper answer to this appears to be, — he interfered too directly with matters of faith. Had he only exercised his power to see that the laws and discipline of the church were properly observed, he would have acquired the respect of his people, and done more to remove the corruptions which had taken root in the Christian world than all the synods that had been held for the last century ; but by mingling the character of the controversialist with that of the emperor, — by confounding the authority which he really and justly possessed, with one which every subject in his dominions, who could reason for himself, disputed, — he weakened his hold of the sceptre, which at this period might have been swayed with the utmost advantage to the whole of Christendom.

Justin, his successor, following the strange example of making his belief the subject of an edict, excited all the schismatics in the empire to fresh expressions of opposition. But his reign was one of continued infamy ; and it would be difficult to determine by which he was most degraded — his avarice*, his cruelty, or his licentiousness. The termination of his career was retributive of the crimes by which it had been marked. Encouraged by the imbecility of his counsels, the Persian generals boldly marched into the very heart of his dominions, and, arriving at the gates of Antioch, roused the miserable monarch from his fancied security, to suffer all the tortures of the most debasing fear. Madness only relieved him from these torments, and his throne was occupied by the Cæsar Tiberius, — a man distinguished

* It is remarked by Evagrius as a curious circumstance, that, notwithstanding the great avarice of this emperor, he built numerous churches and hospitals. Lib. iv. c. 30.

by many virtues, and who won the admiration of his subjects, by recalling from banishment the patriarch Eutychius. That venerable prelate had been the first to withstand Justinian's doctrine respecting the incorruptibility of our Saviour's body, and for his conscientious firmness had suffered an exile of twelve years. During that time, however, he is said to have employed himself in the most beneficent works of charity, and his more ardent eulogists have not failed to add, that he wrought numerous miracles.* His return to Constantinople was, therefore, attended with the most solemn rejoicings. Seated on an ass, a token of humility, when rightly considered, of the most questionable kind, the aged patriarch was conducted into the city by multitudes of devout admirers, who, with branches of trees in their hands, and strewing the way with their garments, hailed him as their chief and father. That he fell into some notions of a doubtful kind respecting the nature of the body after the resurrection, was matter of regret to those who knew best how to appreciate his virtues. But before his death he recanted these supposed errors; and the most valuable testimony of antiquity ascribes to him the highest degree of holiness.

The reign of the emperor Maurice, who succeeded Tiberius in the year 582, extended into the following century. Before recounting, therefore, the events which connected his fortunes with the affairs of the church, we shall now return to take a succinct view of those circumstances in the present period, which could not have been distinctly placed before the reader as matter of chronological arrangement.

It has been already shown, that the Nestorians and Eutychians, divided into an almost infinite variety of subordinate sects, still agitated both the African and Eastern divisions of the church with their disputes and jealousies. But, at times, the sincere and pious Christian saw reason to hope that these factions were fast

* Fleury, liv. xxxiv. 36.

losing ground in the estimation of mankind, and that the pernicious strength with which they had so long carried on the conflict was almost worn out. On his looking, however, beyond the nearest limits of the imperial dominions, both these heresies were seen flourishing with the vigour of plants that had taken root in a new but most congenial soil. In Persia the doctrines of Nestorius constituted the fundamental faith of most of the Christians established in that country. Forming themselves into a church, the advocates of his system had placed one of their number on a patriarchal throne at Seleucia, and thence disseminated their principles throughout the neighbouring nations, and into the remote provinces of India. The Monophysites, on the other hand, had their flourishing colonies, not only in Syria and Egypt, but in Nubia and Abyssinia, where, under the new name of Jacobins, from the monk Jacob, to whose enthusiasm they owed their prosperity, they reared a fortress for Eutychianism, which neither councils nor edicts were able to affect.

Arianism, which had been so long the received faith of Africa and Gaul, was this century nearly driven from its strong-holds in both those countries. The victory of Justinian over the northern tribes which had respectively held possession of those provinces, was the triumph of orthodoxy. A similar effect followed his conquests over the Goths in Italy; and the orthodox, who had been subjected for a century to the most barbarous oppression, now began to recover confidence and authority.

But it is not simply the positive and evident disorder which prevailed in the church at this period that engages the attention and excites the regret of the reflecting mind. Persia was still the seat of persecution as well as Nestorianism; and in England, and other parts of the West, the conflict between the barbarians and their opponents involved large bodies of Christians in the most deplorable ruin. Whatever country is named in the history of this, as in that of the preceding, cen-

tury, a scene is immediately presented to the imagination of fearful domestic strife; or of war and bloodshed. Distressing, however, as this is to the mind, it is what it has been accustomed to meet with in almost every page of human history; and its deepest regret will be reserved for that portion of our subject in which Christianity appears assailed, not by the ordinary passions of mankind, or by those fomented in the furnace of jealousy and ambition, but by the more potent enemies of its growth, superstition and fanaticism, which, undisturbed by the tempests of controversy or persecution, were gradually but surely making their way beneath the underground foundations of the church.

France, raised by the victorious Clovis to an important rank among the newly-established states of the West, early exhibited proofs of this growing evil. Already were its clergy represented as endowed with the power of working the most wondrous miracles: already were the relics of its saints esteemed more capable of curing diseases than the best informed physicians; and St. Severin having healed Clovis himself of a tertian fever, not by the prayer of faith, it should be observed, but because he was the keeper of the relics of St. Maurice, went through Paris every where relieving the sick of their afflictions. In the history of St. Geneviève we have a similar proof of the power which superstition was exercising over the community in general. Having been directed to devote herself to heaven by St. Germain, her mother is said to have been punished with blindness for striking her one day upon the cheek, and to have been cured at the end of two years, by her signing her with the cross with water from a certain well. The gift of miracles was reported to be possessed by her in so high a degree, that people from the most distant quarters came to implore her aid; and after her death, which occurred in the early part of this century, not only was it said that numerous miracles were wrought at her tomb, but she was regularly enshrined as the saint who had especial power and authority to cure fevers.

These deplorable instances of superstition are rendered more gloomy in appearance by their connection with circumstances which evidently prove the existence of a deep spirit of piety, but which existed only to be abridged of its most valuable practical qualities by fanaticism. The self-denial which taught such women as Geneviève to endure the most severe fastings, and other austerities, if exercised in the ordinary walks and duties of social life, would have imbued society with virtues in which consists the very essence of its happiness. And had that fervent devotion with which the aid of saints was sought, and which was deemed requisite to draw the healing energy out of relics, been exercised in simple reference to God, no doubt an answer would have been given by providential dispensations, and in supplies of grace, which would have produced results more than equivalent to miracles.

But Christianity had been propagated, in the provinces subject to the northern tribes, under circumstances less favourable to itself than to its corruptions. Impetuous and uncivilised, their characters tempted the zealous but injudicious missionaries of the faith to flatter their imaginations, or excite their fears, by methods inconsistent with the spirit of the religion which they taught. This was a most destructive error. By adapting their language, and the general tone of their exhortations, too closely to the present feelings of their auditors, they only obtained their attention by the sacrifice of what was most essential in their instructions. Instead of effecting a change in the dispositions of the people, they, in many instances, merely gave them one class of unaffecting rites instead of another; and, deceiving themselves into the idea that they had secured their conversion, proceeded to build on the foundation of sentiments still heathen in the main, a pompous pyramid of useless ordinances. Hence it was that the converted barbarians retained all their warlike propensities; that their prayers were addressed to God for victory, as if they only conceived him to be more glori-

ous, because more potent in war, than their former god ; that it required miracles, or pretended miracles, to keep them in temper with their new faith ; and that it was only in proportion as civilisation advanced, and circumstances enabled men to look at Christianity for themselves, that a general conformity to its simplest precepts was approached.

It is, therefore, not matter of surprise, that superstition should have characterised at this period a considerable portion of the Christian world. It is an error, in fact, but one that is scarcely avoidable, of ecclesiastical history, to represent nations as converted to Christianity, which barely received its name ; and the vices and barbarities which disgraced them after their supposed conversion, are set down in the catalogue of offences charged against Christians, while their true place would be among those belonging to the worshippers of Jupiter, Mars, or Odin.

Unfortunately, however, it was not only in those provinces of Christendom, where the gospel had been thus imperfectly planted, that superstition was gaining ground. It was in this century that the church of Rome began to load the worshippers of Christ with as heavy a burden of ceremonies and pomps as had been of necessity imposed on the people of Israel. The chief promoter of this abuse was the celebrated Gregory, a man who, in other respects, deserves a very large proportion of the reputation he obtained both for wisdom and piety.

This distinguished prelate was of noble origin ; and while his father possessed the dignity of a Roman senator, his mother was celebrated for virtues which obtained her the honour of canonisation. For some time he himself exercised an elevated office in the government of the state, and, though devoted from early years to a life of piety, shared in all the splendid pomps of the court. It is not improbable, but that to this circumstance was in some degree owing that love of show and ceremony which appears in many of his ordinances. But in the midst of his secular career, he became convinced that the world could afford him few

opportunities of increasing in holiness ; and at the death of his father he not only expended a large portion of his inheritance in building monasteries, but of that which he founded at Rome became himself a most devout inmate. The fastings and other austerities which he endured were of the severest kind, but his humility was in proportion to his other virtues, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he could be persuaded to accept the office of abbot, which it was found necessary to force upon him. It was soon after his elevation to this office, that the circumstance occurred which connects his name in so honourable a manner with the history of Christianity in England. Happening one day to be passing through the market-place at Rome, where some young Anglo-Saxon slaves were exposed for sale, he was so struck with their appearance, as to be induced to make enquiries respecting their name and country. According to the account given of the occurrence, his conversation respecting the slaves was carried on in the following manner :—“ Whence come these captives ? ” “ From the Isle of Britain.” — “ Are the natives of that island Christians ? ” “ No : they are Pagans.” — “ It is sad that the author of darkness should possess men with such bright faces : but what is the name of their particular nation ? ” “ They are called *Angli* ; and rightly so, for their angel-like faces : they ought to be co-heirs with the angels in heaven.” — “ In what province of England did they live ? ” “ In Deira.” — “ They must be freed *de Dei irâ* (from the anger of God). How is the king of the country called ? ” “ Ella.” — “ Surely Hallelujah ought to be sung in his kingdom to the praise of God who created all things.” *

Gregory having gained the pope's assent to the design he now formed of attempting the conversion of the English, proposed setting out for this country him- A.D. 581.

* Fuller's Church Hist. of Britain, cent. vi. Christianity was early planted in this country. Its first martyr, St. Alban, proved, at the beginning of the fourth century, the power which it then exercised ; but the subsequent invasions had nearly extinguished its light.

self. But scarcely had he left the gates of Rome, when the people, who had long learnt to revere him as a saint, compelled him to return. He was, notwithstanding, not long permitted to remain among them. Having been appointed one of the seven deacons of the Roman church, he was soon after sent by the pope as his nuncio to Constantinople, where the sanctity of his manners, and the proofs he gave of commanding talents, recommended him to the favour of the emperor, and the general admiration of the people.

On the death of Pelagius II. he was elected to the papal chair. It required, however, not merely persuasions, but stratagem, and even force, to make him accept the high dignity to which he was thus appointed by the unanimous voice of public respect. He lamented his elevation, as finally depriving him of that leisure for prayer and retirement, in which he found both his chief happiness and his safety. "It has been my constant effort," he said, in a letter to the emperor's sister, "to separate myself from the world, to estrange my mind from all corporeal objects, in order that I may the better contemplate things invisible and celestial. I said to God, from the bottom of my heart, 'Lord! I seek thy face.' And as I neither feared nor desired any thing in the world, I believed myself to be exalted above it. But the storm of this new temptation has suddenly overwhelmed me with alarms and apprehensions. I am on all sides beaten by the billows. When I cease from business, and strive to enter again into myself, the tumult of vain thoughts resists my efforts; and I find that my heart is distant from me." In writing to another of his friends, he makes an observation, which it would have been well for the church in general had it operated practically on the minds of all Christian prelates. "Weep, if you love me, for I have so many temporal affairs to attend to in the situation which I occupy, that I find myself almost separated by this dignity from the love of God."

The zeal with which he performed the duties of the

station which he thus unwillingly occupied, was answerable to his deep sense of its responsibility. But, unfortunately, the piety of Gregory was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the times, in respect to its ceremonial manifestations. Instead, therefore, of endeavouring to counteract the increasing spirit of superstition, he only took it under his own control; and when he should have relieved the church of that ever-accumulating burden of rites under which it groaned, only employed his influence and abilities in forming them into a system.

Rules for the administration of the sacraments had been drawn up by pope Gelasius, towards the conclusion of the fifth century; and it is easy to perceive, from the accounts given of this formula, how far the worship of the church had degenerated from its ancient simplicity. But either the rules which Gelasius had laid down were insufficient for the insurance of regularity, or the taste of Gregory required a more magnificent display of discipline. One of the first cares of his pontificate was to reform this rubric; and the work which he composed out of the materials left him by his predecessor, and those supplied by his own fertile imagination, is known by the title of his *Sacramentary*. From this production it appears that his personal humility had no effect upon his mind when arranging the ceremonies of the church, and that the knowledge of the gospel, which taught him how precious a virtue is meekness, and how desirable is spirituality of thought, had not led him to perceive that the minds of the people could never be inspired with reverence for such qualities by a constant succession of ostentatious displays.

A description of the mode in which mass was celebrated on one of the great festival days will enable the reader to form his own judgment on this important part of our subject. The new *Sacramentary* of Gregory contained rules not only for the administration of the sacraments, but for their successive solemnisation at the principal churches of the city, which, for that purpose,

was divided into so many stations. On Easter Sunday, the ceremony, according to this regulation, took place at the church of St. Mary the Greater; and early in the morning of that day all the acolytes of the third quarter, and the clergy charged with the care of the poor, repaired to the palace of the Lateran. The rest of the clergy, headed by a numerous body of bishops, proceeded in the mean time to the church, where they awaited the coming of the pope. Both he and his chief officers appeared on horseback: attendant on this splendid train were the ministers of the poor, and the acolytes, one of whom carried a phial containing the holy anointing oil. A short time before the pope reached the gates of the church, the principal priest of the station, with the acolytes and others, went out to meet him; and the deacons, having assisted him to dismount, conducted him into the vestibule. There the ceremony commenced of changing habits; and in this, as in other things, the most rigid rules were observed. The deacons changed them at the gate. In the sacristy the pope was attended by the sub-deacons, each of whom took some particular portion of his robes, which were already as numerous as those of the Jewish high priest; and were regarded by the dark imagination of superstition, as not less symbolical of holiness than the vestments were to which, by a positive divine ordinance, holiness had been attached.

The service was begun by the chanting of certain hymns, called "Introites;" and their commencement was the signal for the pope's leaving the sacristy, and entering the body of the church. As he proceeded up the aisles, he was supported by the chief deacon, while before him went seven acolytes carrying the incense and seven candlesticks. On reaching the altar, he gave the signal for the *Gloria Patri*, which concluded the introductory hymn, and then, after praying for some time in silence, kissing the altar and the book of the Gospels, he took his seat, on which the choir began chanting the *Kurie Eleison*. This part of the service continued till he again gave the signal for silence, when, turning to-

wards the congregation, he repeated alone the *Gloria in excelsis*. This being concluded, he blessed the people, turning alternately during the performance of these offices towards the place where they were collected, and towards the East. The collect for the day was next read ; and the pope and the clergy in general resumed their seats, which were ranged in a semicircle on the farther side of the altar. One of the subdeacons then ascended a little tribunal, and read the epistle. This being done, he was followed by a chorister, who chanted the hymns appointed for the service of the day, when the chief deacon of the church, after having received the pope's blessing, approached in front of the assembly, kissed the Gospels, and taking them in his hands, proceeded, with two deacons, and two acolytes walking before him, and carrying censers and candlesticks, to the pulpit. The portion of the Gospel appointed for the day having been read, a subdeacon took the book and carried it round the whole congregation for every one to kiss. Gregory generally preached at the conclusion of this part of the service ; and the *Dominus vobiscum*, or the *Oremus*, terminated that portion of the ceremony which preceded the celebration of mass.

As little was simplicity observed in the administration of this most solemn of Christian rites as in those which were purely of human invention. The only resemblance which the communion now bore to the same sacred ordinance in the primitive times of the church, was derived from the circumstance, that the offerings were made in large portions of bread and wine. In receiving them, the pope went round the congregation, attended by two acolytes, who held the loaves, which were round, and made by those who presented them, and by the chief deacon, who, taking the wine flasks, which were also presented as offerings, poured their contents into the capacious chalices that were carried by the attendant subdeacon and acolytes.

The offerings being thus collected, the pope returned to his seat, and having, as well as the chief

deacon, washed his hands, gave directions to the latter to furnish the altar with the proper vessels, and the bread and wine necessary for the rite. A little water was then poured into a chalice in the form of a cross; and the pope, once more descending his chair, approached the altar, which he again reverently kissed, and received the offerings of the clergy, and among them his own, which was presented by the chief deacon. While he was thus engaged, the choir sang the Offertory, and at its conclusion, he and the whole body of the clergy, bending before the altar, spent some moments in silent prayer. The latter remained in the same posture, while he read the canon, which was commenced immediately after the choir had sung the *Sanctus*. This being concluded, the chief deacon took the chalice and carried it to the pope, who touched the side of it with the host, and replaced it in its former position, the cover being all the time carefully held by one of the acolytes, in a linen cloth which formed part of his habiliments. A prayer and a blessing were then said; and the pope making the sign of the cross with his hand three times on the chalice, the host was put into it which had been consecrated the day before, and had been presented at the commencement of the ceremony. It was now carried to every person in the congregation to kiss; and this being done, the host was broken by the pope and the clergy, the chief deacon, when they had finished, directing the choir to chant the *Agnus Dei*.

At length the preparations were ended, and the pope, rising from his seat and turning towards the East, partook of the sacred elements. He then put a morsel of the host of which he had himself partaken into the chalice, and next poured some little of the wine which had been consecrated into a vessel full of unconsecrated wine, it being the general opinion, says Fleury, "that the wine was fully consecrated by the mixture of the blood of our Lord." The bishops received the host from the hands of the pope, and afterwards the priests approached for the same purpose; but it was the chief

deacon who administered to them the contents of the chalice.

When the clergy had all communicated, the pope left his chair, and presented the host to that part of the congregation which occupied the first seats next the altar. With him was the chief deacon, who administered the wine by means of a golden tube. The bishops and clergy, in general, performed the same office towards the rest of the congregation; and during the whole of the ceremony the choir was engaged in chanting the psalms appointed for the solemnity. As soon as all had received the sacrament, the pope again approached the altar, and, without turning towards the people, said the concluding prayer and blessing, at the end of which the deacon who attended him, on receiving the sign, dismissed the congregation by saying, *Ite, missa est!* *

Such was the ceremonial with which the Roman church, in the sixth century, had violated the simplicity of a Christian sacrament. If the advocates of such a system were asked, for what purpose is the rite celebrated at all? what could they answer, but that, according to the commands of their Lord, it was observed in remembrance of him, and of his charity and his sufferings. This, if Scripture be in any measure the rule of faith, is the only reply a Christian can in fairness or propriety make; and then what answer could be given if it were asked, — which method is more likely to call an event to remembrance, that which is of so ambitious a nature, that the mind runs a fair chance of being wholly occupied with the means employed, or that which simply recalls the event to recollection, leaving the recollection, if the event figured belongs entirely to the affections or to faith, to operate according to the value which the mind of the believer actually puts upon it? It is from ecclesiastics not paying due attention to this distinction that many of the worst corruptions in the church have arisen. Had it been borne in mind that, as religion can have no other foundation but God, so it can only operate on the

* Fleury, xxxvi. 15. Du Pin, Bibliot. Pat. art. Gregory.

hearts or understandings of men by the force of its own truth, it would have been seen that whatever impressions are produced in the name of religion, but not by the direct influence of its truth, are neither to be considered as its triumphs, nor valued as proofs that the system in vogue is beneficial to sound piety. There is a solemnity in certain well managed spectacles which can hardly fail to affect the mind with a feeling of seriousness ; but a feeling of this nature may be very strong and yet very indefinite : it may give rise to a quick succession of emotions, and yet suggest no tangible or enduring thoughts. And this, it may be fairly conjectured, is the common case with all religious pomps. The spectator goes with a mind willing to be excited : the grandeur and solemnity of the formalities, the fixed silence and attention with which those around him contemplate them, quickly place him in the state of excitement he desires. But it is the lowest of all mental states ; and it is hence that an unlearned, or slothful, or ambitious priesthood will always have recourse to such exhibitions, because the mass of the people may thereby be kept obedient, and religion be made to serve the purposes of state without the trouble being taken of raising their minds to the apprehension of the truth itself. Considered, moreover, by the test of Scripture, or the general economy of the Christian covenant, nothing can be more contrary to the duty of the church than this employment of outward ceremony to produce feelings of devotion. Prayer and preaching are both sanctified by promises of grace ; and the Holy Spirit descends in baptism to confirm the blessing of the Father and the Son. But there are no promises for the proud and luxurious spectacle ; and if God gives no grace for these human inventions, of what worth are they ? In preaching and praying, words and thoughts are employed. On these the Spirit may act, and imbue them with life and energy, and thereby fit them for operating with power on the hearts of all who receive them : but the gay materials of a show,—costly

vestments, flambeaux, bells, censers, and incense, — can have no life-imparting energy in themselves ; and must, therefore, if they are at any time useful as religious aids, derive that usefulness from the efficacy given them by a positive ordinance, and by one the more positive, because there is less natural fitness in such means than in the living words of the human mind, — the habitation of the Spirit. But what intimation is to be found in the Scriptures of the New Testament of such an ordinance in favour of ceremonies ? And if none such exists, what but a useless burden, and a dangerous innovation, ought the introduction of these complicated and pompous formalities to be considered ? It is not, however, only from the ceremonial instructions of Gregory that we learn the growth of superstition, or the part which he took in furthering its increase ; his letters abound with numerous distressing proofs, that most of the abuses which have disgraced the church, as formed by the union of rational beings, were confirmed by his precepts and example. Thus, in a letter to the empress, who had requested some relics of St. Peter and St. Paul, he informed her that they were not to be approached without the utmost fear ; and illustrated this remark, by relating how his predecessor was troubled with visions for having desired to try their virtue, and how the persons who were engaged in searching for something about the tomb of St. Lawrence died in ten days. He next tells her that the relics themselves were never given, but only a piece of stuff or linen, which had been placed near them ; qualifying his refusal, however, of any thing more precious, by promising her some filings from St. Peter's chain, provided the priest who was appointed to execute the office could obtain them, — holiness in those who desired them being necessary to make the file take effect.

Similar examples of gross superstition might be selected from many other epistles of this eminent man ; and however we may admire the integrity of his disposition, the pure love of piety which seems to have

influenced whatever he did, and the care with which he endeavoured to suppress the ambition and other vices of the clergy, we have the strongest reason to believe that the good which he did was considerably outweighed by the corruptions which he fostered, and that, pure and upright as he was in himself, he opened the doors of the church as wide as they could stand to the most designing and unholy,—to that large class of men whom the facile imagination of the multitude is ever tempting to practise on their credulity and obedience.

One species of error is usually followed by others, when the cause of the first may be traced either to the low and uncultivated state of the public mind, or to any radical misapprehension of a commonly received system. Thus, while the external rites and ceremonies of the church were multiplied by the mistaken zeal of one class of men, another set of devotees were as closely engaged in building up, and extending, the plan of that system of asceticism which we have seen so successfully begun by the recluses of the desert. The chief promoter of that increasing passion for monastic institutions which distinguished this century was the celebrated Benedict, whom the Christian world may charge with having done more than any of his predecessors towards establishing a plan for rendering its most valuable and conscientious members almost wholly useless to their fellow-beings.

The early part of Benedict's life was passed in the exercise of austerities which might bear comparison with most of those undergone by his predecessors. He was sent, when a boy, to study at Rome; but, becoming disgusted with the vices of his schoolfellows, he secretly left the place, and fled to a spot named Sublac, where he discovered a little obscure cavern, in which he immediately took up his abode.* Young as he was, he preferred the gloom and privations of this solitude to all the comforts which would have been provided for him in society by his wealthy parents. The only human

* Fleury, *Hist. Ecclési.* liv. xxxii. 13.

being who knew the place of his retreat, or with whom he conversed for three years, was one of the monks of a neighbouring monastery. To this pious man he was indebted for the humble fare on which he existed ; and as the situation of his cave, in the hollow of a tremendous precipice, prevented any frequent communication, the bread was let down by a rope, to which the good monk attached a little bell, the sound of which warned the young anchorite that his kind benefactor had not forgotten him. At length, however, this faithful attendant on Benedict was sent into France to preside over a monastery in that country, and the poor recluse remained for a considerable time without food. He was subsequently discovered by another monk of the same monastery, but how is not apparent : the common account is, that the father was warned of his condition in a dream. However this might be, the virtues of Benedict were no longer concealed : the inhabitants of the surrounding district, acquainted with his history and the holy life he led, flocked to his cave to beseech his blessing ; and the abbot of a neighbouring monastery dying soon after, he was compelled, against all his entreaties to the contrary, to leave the cavern, and become the superior of the establishment.

But the lessons which he had learnt in his solitude were of too stern a character even for monks ; and some idea of the state of monastic establishments at this early period may be formed from the commonly related fact, that these very men, who had elected him for their abbot, sought to remove him by poison. Little credit will be given to the tradition, that he discovered their intention by signing the glass which held the wine with the sign of the cross, and that the vessel fell and was dashed into pieces ; but he appears to have only mildly rebuked them for their inconsistency, and then sought the peaceful retreat from which he had been so reluctantly enticed.

Additional fame accrued to him from this event ; and his cave became the resort of all who desired an eminent

example for the practice of holiness, and practical instructions as to its attainment. Benedict, though not experienced in the world, and knowing little of mankind as they are operated upon by the complicated feelings and interests of society, was deeply versed in the science which teaches its votaries to understand the motions of the mind, when intently anxious in the pursuit of holiness, when it is awakened by the warnings of conscience, and trembling between hope and doubt as to its final destiny. The counsel, therefore, which he gave was such as went to the hearts of all who heard him: the visiters to his cave became every day more numerous; and so large at length was their number, that he found it expedient to divide them into companies, and establish monasteries for their reception.

The success with which he had taught those who frequented his cave encouraged him to bolder attempts in the cause of religion. He threw down the remaining emblems of paganism which he met with in his wanderings, and laboured among those who venerated the idols, till he converted them to Christianity. Even the Gothic king, Totila, was moved by the accounts given of his extraordinary piety and abilities: but his astonishment was mixed with a large proportion of incredulity; and he determined to prove the truth of what he had heard, before he tendered that reverence to the saint which it was said he merited. To put his divine endowments, therefore, to the test, he habited one of his attendants in the royal robes, and sent him with a splendid retinue to the monastery which Benedict had founded in the little village of Cassino, and in which he then resided. But scarcely had the pretended king opened his mouth, when the saint immediately bade him lay aside the robes, and appear in his proper character. Terrified at the glance of the holy man, he fell prostrate on the earth; and, on rising, hastened with all speed to acquaint his master with the result of his experiment.

Totila himself approached the presence of Benedict

with the utmost humility, and could not be persuaded to rise from the ground, on which he lay prostrate, till lifted up by the saint himself. According to the most popular accounts of their interview, Benedict told him that he had committed many evil deeds, and would commit many more ; that he would enter Rome, pass the sea, and, having reigned nine years, perish in the tenth : circumstances which in reality took place ; but the prediction of which, by Benedict, is to be ranked with the other miraculous acts of that excellent man. His death, the period of which he is said to have foretold, occurred in the year 543 ; by which time he had not only established numerous monasteries in various parts of Italy, but had gained so much reputation by the system of discipline pursued at Cassino, that he was thenceforth regarded as the head and chief of the monastic orders.

The rule of St. Benedict, or the work in which he lays down the principles by which his followers were to be governed, is divided into seventy-seven chapters ; and exhibits, in a striking manner, the merit which the most sincerely devout men of the age erroneously attributed to works, unconnected with the interests of either faith or charity. As an illustration of the severity which distinguished his order, it will be sufficient to cite the directions which he gave as to the admission of a new member. For four days he was to stand at the gate, and entreat the porter, who was to repel his advances in the sternest manner, to admit him. If he persevered, and obtained an entrance, he was to be led into a chamber appointed for strangers, and there attended by one of the most ancient men of the monastery, who was to make him acquainted, at first, with the severest rules of the order ; and then, if he expressed no backwardness to submit, with the remainder. Having passed this preliminary examination, the candidate was allowed to become a novice ; and when he had completed six months of his noviciate, was again examined. If his answers now proved satisfac-

tory, he was allowed to remain among the novices, and at the end of four months the examination was renewed. This was the last trial he had to endure ; and if he passed it successfully, he was numbered among the brethren. In the ceremony of his admission, he had to take the most solemn vows that he would continue faithful to the obligations of the order ; that he would never leave the boundaries of the monastery ; and that whatever he possessed had been, or was to be, resigned to the establishment, or to the poor. The substance of this declaration was also to be written down, and signed by the new monk ; after doing which, he was finally admitted as a member of the order. But one of the most remarkable points in the rule of Benedict is, that he allowed children to be brought by their parents for admission, and to be bound by their responses to observe all the fearful severities of the most austere society in the world ; their sponsors adding, at the same time, that they would give them no property, except as it was to pass from them to the order.

It is easy to discover, even from this slight view of the institutions of Benedict, how powerfully the monastic rule was adapted to favour the corruptions of an avaricious priesthood : how much it tended to strengthen the sovereignty of the pope, by bringing large bodies of devotees completely under his inspection and control ; and how greatly it contributed to render every superstitious practice permanent, and to augment the number, by shutting men up with their imagination and feelings on the ferment, and leaving no outlet for that flood of accumulating thoughts, if they were thinking, or of fancies, if they were weak men, which would be naturally generated by their solitude.

The argument most commonly urged in favour of these establishments is, that they were beneficial in the protection of learning and its materials : that but for them the treasures of the classic ages would have perished ; and that modern Europe, therefore, is indebted to their institution for much of its present

enlightenment. That this is in some measure true there can be little doubt ; but when monastic institutions are defended on this plea, it may be answered, that they were themselves instrumental in bringing about that very darkness against which, unconsciously, they provided an antidote. Every religion exercises some degree of influence on the people who profess it : that of Christianity a very strong one ; and ruled as the mass of the people, both in the eastern and western provinces, now were by the clergy, it may reasonably be supposed that their character was considerably affected by the mode in which religion was taught them. And what were the methods then employed to keep them in obedience to the church ? Without question, such as were in every respect calculated to enfeeble rather than strengthen, to confuse rather than enlighten. Had Christianity been delivered to the people in its native purity, there is reason to believe that it would have inspired them with that moral vigour which the state of the times required. But it was forced into the service of enervating pomp and luxury. Its authority over the mind was bartered to increase its influence on the imagination ; and the weak and indolent were encouraged in their imbecile habits. While the multitude were thus left to unopposed degeneracy, the most valuable portion of the better class,—those men of strong minds and ardent character, whose dispositions would have led them into the most active and useful walks of life,—were either converted into wrangling controversialists, or tempted to immure themselves in perpetual imprisonment. What could have been expected from such a state of things, had the empire even enjoyed great prosperity at the time ? With a people ill-taught, ill-directed, and deprived of their best examples by a false enthusiasm, it would have speedily lost whatever strength it possessed, and tempted the cupidity of the first adventurer that discovered its condition. The northern barbarians were, it is true, in preparation to attack the empire long before it felt any of the evil effects resulting from the

causes here alluded to ; but there is every reason to believe that their progress was facilitated at a subsequent period by the corruptions of religion, and a still farther reason to deplore those corruptions, inasmuch as they deprived the only source of moral strength and energy of its best qualities. How much merit ought to be placed to the account of monastic institutions, when these things are considered, is not perhaps to be determined ; but certain it is, that, in deciding upon their claims to the praise given them for protecting learning, it should not be forgotten that they contributed materially both to stop the free circulation of thought for centuries, and to leave society exposed to troubles which, had the energies of its members been fairly exercised, it might never have had to endure.

This view of the subject is rendered still more probable by what we positively know respecting the opinions of the most celebrated advocates of monasticism. The schools which were attached to cathedral churches supplied instruction for large numbers of young persons : but it was of too limited a kind for the proper purposes of education ; and many eminent men of the age began to encourage the notion, that the less there was of learning the more there would be of piety. It is reported of Gregory himself, that he had so strong an idea of its incompatibility with the cultivation of holiness, that he ordered the destruction of many classical manuscripts, and united with those who made it a matter of conscience not to favour education. This was perfectly consistent with every other branch of the system which the clergy had introduced, and was even necessary to its preservation : is it not highly probable, then, that the cause of learning was as much injured by this systematic opposition to its existence as it gained by being protected from the barbarians in obscurity ? Or is there not reason to suppose that it would never have wanted this species of protection had the minds of men been properly furnished and employed ?

To the learned Cassiodorus, and the equally erudite

and eloquent Boethius, pertains the glory of having resisted the opposition thus made to the diffusion of knowledge. But both these accomplished men were engaged in the active duties of life ; were statesmen as well as scholars ; and in the court of Theodoric did more reasonable service to the cause of learning than could ever be done by those who confined its utility to themselves. The great object which Cassiodorus proposed to himself, when, by the value of his talents, he had won the favour of the Gothic prince, was to inspire his master with a respect for learning * ; and in doing that, he did but what every other man of intelligence might have done with other barbarian conquerors, and have thereby enabled learning to preserve its station, notwithstanding all the convulsions with which it was surrounded. Boethius, it is true, fell a sacrifice to the untamed barbarity of the king ; but the obscurity which hangs about the accounts of his death leads to the suspicion that he suffered for some political offence which the jealousy of his enemies would not allow Theodoric to pardon. It deserves, however, to be remarked, that Cassiodorus, who retreated from court at the death of Boethius, and founded a monastery in which to repose himself after a life of labour, was the person who first set the example of employing the monks as copyists. The active habits he had acquired in the world would not allow him to pass the remainder of his days in unprofitable solitude. He collected copies of the most valuable classics wherever they were to be found ; pursued the same plan in respect to the Scriptures, and set the members of his establishment carefully to compare one manuscript with another ; wrote instructions on the best methods to be followed in copying, and at the age of ninety-three composed a treatise for the use of his monks on orthography. But had Cassiodorus been himself brought up a monk — had he been doomed from youth to the walls of a monastery — would he have possessed this activity of mind ? Or would he have divined

* Tiraboschi, *Storia della Let. Ital.* lii. 11.

this method for rendering monasteries treasure-houses of learning?

The state of religion in those parts of the world which were least under the influence of the Roman see, was in striking contrast with what it was where that power held the chief sway. But to the mind of the reflecting Christian it is only in contrast; and he feels equally unable to decide in which quarter of the world religion was most abused, and by which it suffered most,—by superstition or by heresy. Enough has been already said of the disputes in the Eastern church, to show the temper of mind which chiefly prevailed among its members. But it may also be thence gathered, that the distinct offices of religion and philosophy had been confounded together by the greater number of theologians: that they had neglected to consider the difference between proving a truth and explaining one; and that, in consequence, they disputed with the pride of philosophers and the rancorous zeal of sectarians.

Much, however, as we must lament these controversies, and plainly as they were prejudicial to the cause of genuine Christianity, they afford evident proofs of the mental activity which prevailed among the disputants, and of the existence of considerable erudition among the members of the parties into which they were divided. The simplicity of our religion, in most of its details, and the humility with which it requires us to receive the rest, give an air of presumptuous folly to the subtle language of polemics. But, considered without respect to the divine nature of the subject on which they treat, the keen and penetrating arguments of the Nestorian and Eutychian controversialists, of the Monophysites, and various other sects which sprung from the same root, cannot fail of eliciting admiration for their remarkable, though useless and dangerous, ingenuity. Through their contentions were preserved the few remnants of philosophy which still existed in the world as the nourishment of the human mind. In Alexandria an early union had taken place between the Platonists

and the Christians. Athens had beheld a union of a similar kind ; and more than one eminent theologian had consecrated it, by exhibiting the system thence formed with all the graces of eloquence, and all the still more tempting qualities of mystery. But whenever philosophy and Christianity become blended together, and the mass is received as religion, the ingredients may be mixed in every proportion, and the mixture will yet be called by the same name. Thus there were Christian philosophers whose faith formed the mere colouring of their theory ; and the gospel was, in many instances, almost superseded by the seemingly clearer and better developed system which these philosophers had wrought out of what they appeared to consider the hints which God had given them. It is generally supposed, that it was owing to this state of things that the emperor Justinian closed the schools of philosophy at Athens. But he was also, no doubt, influenced by the dislike which he long cherished against the Origenists. In every respect, indeed, that zealous defender of the church had reason to view with suspicion the influence of the philosophers. While some held the name of Christian, without retaining any more than the shadow of the faith, there were others who openly took part with the heathen. Of this number was the celebrated lawyer Tribonian, whom Justinian employed to compile his Code ; and it has occasioned the surprise of historians, that he, and other men of a similar character, should have been unmolested by any exercise of imperial power. It is, however, not improbable, that Tribonian, and the rest who were left to themselves, were too much men of business to take any particular part in religious affairs ; and that their opposition to Christianity was of that negative kind which there is so much less reason to dread when unnoticed than when stirred into action.

The prospect presented by these various circumstances is sufficiently gloomy ; and we turn with satisfaction to examine those, few as they are, which wear a contrary

aspect. Of these, the first which ought to be mentioned is, that, notwithstanding the strong tendency to superstition observable in most of the writers of this age, the works of many of them exhibit the deepest piety, and a pure and earnest zeal for the inculcation of virtue. Thus, Fulgentius, one of the most distinguished of the African writers, employed the chief part of his time in matters of controversy; but insisted, with great energy, that, though none could be saved, or obtain pardon of sins, without the church, none could be saved in the church unless they were truly converted, and had wholly forsaken their sins. Anastasius, who had been a monk in one of the monasteries on Mount Sinai, and was promoted to the see of Antioch in the latter part of this century, was also a controversialist, but endowed with a love of truth and charity, which cannot be too much extolled. In the instructions he gave respecting the proper manner of resisting heresy, he lays it down as the first rule, that he who would keep the truth must lead a life of innocence and piety, and have the Holy Spirit abiding in him. Next, that he should make himself thoroughly acquainted with the opposite doctrines, and with the writings of those who uphold them: that he ought not to take pleasure in disputing with every one he met on such subjects, but that he should read the whole Bible with a quiet and humble spirit, and with the utmost simplicity of intention. St. John Climacus was another monk of Mount Sinai, and wrote a work, to which he gave the title of *The Scale*, or *Climax*, whence his own appellation of Climacus. Much of this book is taken up with precepts adapted only to the life of seclusion which the author and his brethren led in their monastery; but it also contains many precepts of great practical worth, and such as prove that the writer had a clear apprehension of the nature of holiness. *The Scale* is divided into thirty degrees, each of which answers to some virtue; and the author proceeds regularly through the whole, illustrating the importance of the several duties

both from Scripture and his own experience. But nothing can be better adapted to convince the reader of the intense devotion with which these rules were attended to by the monks, than the account given, under the head of penitence, of the punishments to which they voluntarily submitted for their sins. About a mile distant from the principal monastery was another for penitents, known under the appropriate name of the Prison. The horrible darkness and filth of this place were but faintly typical of the sufferings endured by the inmates. It is impossible, perhaps, to form any idea of the mental agony which must have been experienced by these unfortunate people, before they had recourse to this mode of seeking forgiveness. Human nature revolts from such violations of its principles, except when the mind is harrowed by the most terrifying fears, and it hopes to satisfy, by its own voluntary inflictions on the body, the vengeance which would be felt so much more dreadfully in the soul. But not considering that even a life spent in constant misery was sufficient to prove their penitence, the prisoners of Sinai ordered that no funeral rites should be paid to their remains. Humility, indeed, was never more strongly exemplified; and thus, while we have to lament the corruptions of doctrine which had so perverted the aim of true Christian repentance, we have to acknowledge that, according to the views which prevailed, the age was not deficient in instances of the most conscientious devotion. Several other writers, of the same class as those above named, sought, with similar zeal, to enforce the practice of what they considered to be the highest moral duties; and in their classification of which they were seldom, except when asceticism was concerned, mistaken.

While the ascetics were thus engaged, another set of writers employed themselves in composing, or compiling, commentaries on various portions of the Scriptures; and though the methods they pursued are often objectionable, and their interpretations forced and fanciful, many of the works thus produced exhibit a laudable degree of in-

dustry, and the most profound reverence for the word of God. To these proofs that the spirit of religion, though clogged and oppressed, was still alive and active, we may add another, derived from the efforts made by some of the principal members of the church in favour of nations which had not yet received the light of the gospel. This country was among the first which reaped advantage from their zeal. Gregory, who, as we have seen, turned his attention to England at an early period of his career, took the promptest measures, on his accession to the pontificate, for its conversion. The minister whom he chose to carry his benevolent designs into execution was Augustine, the abbot of his monastery, and a man on whose ardent piety he could safely rely. With him were associated several monks; and the company set out, with many prayers and blessings, for the remote and dangerous shores of Britain. They had proceeded, however, no farther than Provence, when they became alarmed at the prospect of the difficulties which threatened them, and formed the resolution of requesting the pope's permission to return. Augustine was accordingly despatched by his colleagues to Rome: but Gregory only answered his representations with more earnest entreaties that he would persevere, and with an eloquent display of the rewards which they might look for from Heaven, if they did not faint. At the same time he gave him letters to the king of Burgundy, and several other princes, as well as to the bishops, through whose provinces they had to pass.

Thus encouraged, Augustine returned to his associates; and the mission, which now consisted of forty monks, arrived safely in the Isle of Thanet. Happily, during their stay in France, they had acquired the favour of Charibert, king of that country, and whose daughter, Bertha, was married to Ethelbert, king of Kent, and the most powerful of the Anglo-Saxon monarchs. The messengers whom Augustine sent to this prince, acquainting him with his arrival, were charged to tell him, that they brought tidings of the method by

which were to be obtained eternal happiness and glory, the peace and the blessing of the true God. Ethelbert heard the messengers with attention, and soon after repaired to the place where Augustine had landed. The abbot received him with all those formalities of which the ministers of religion had, unfortunately, grown so enamoured: but, instead of exciting the monarch's veneration thereby, he seems only to have raised his suspicions; and the prudent answer with which his address was met serves to impress us with the highest respect for the good sense of the Saxon. He could not, he said, change his own or his people's religion, without much consideration; but that, coming, as they had done, from so distant a country, for the sole purpose of making known what they considered it would be good for him to know, he willingly admitted them into his kingdom, would afford them protection, and not prevent any who chose from becoming their converts.

Augustine proceeded, after this interview, to the city of Canterbury, where Ethelbert held his court, and where an asylum was provided for him and his companions. The manifest holiness with which these men conducted themselves, the power of their eloquence, and the interest naturally attending the subjects on which they spoke, produced in time a considerable impression on those whom they addressed. Numbers of persons at length professed their conversion to the Christian faith; and Ethelbert himself, having fairly compared the foundation on which it stood with that of paganism, became a convert, and was baptized, with the principal nobles of his court. Christianity was thus established in the island; and though Ethelbert's kingdom was but a small proportion of the whole country, the existence of a church under the protection of a prince whose authority was on the increase might be regarded as a certain augury that the light of the gospel would not be again put out.*

Similar exertions were also made at this period for

* Fuller, cent. vi. p. 56—58.

perfecting the conversion of those countries where Christianity had been only partially received. Both France and Germany were in this state; and the labours of Remigius, bishop of Rheims, in the former, were crowned with the most auspicious results. Even the remote valleys of the Picts and the Scots had their apostle; while the equally inhospitable lands on the opposite side of the globe, the bleak valleys of the Caucasus, and the shores of the Euxine, were traversed by the devout emissaries of the Eastern patriarchs.

It was thus that the Almighty, by his Spirit and his Providence, still increased the boundaries of his kingdom, and preserved the faith, even amid all the corruptions with which it was surrounded, from losing its power over men's consciences. The most cursory view of the state of the church in this century is calculated to awaken a long series of interesting reflections. It was evidently an age of strong religious excitement. In what we have to admire, as well as in what we have to regret, we discover the operation of a most ardent zeal. Superstition was not more enthusiastic than heresy; nor was heresy less resolute in the support of its dogmas, than it was, when joined to ambition, in the pursuit of authority. In almost every incident related, we discover traces of this busy, excited spirit, — of the operation of principles which were to produce the greatest good or the greatest evil, according to the direction they should take, — and the signs of that momentous contest which was so soon to be waged between ecclesiastical pride on the one side, and this ardent, excited spirit on the other. The lamps of the altar were burning with an unnatural lustre. They shed a light which many mistook for that of truth, and by which few were not dazzled. But the glare of the sanctuary was to remain, when it only served to fling a darker shadow over the earth, and this period of excitement was to be followed by another of corresponding apathy and gloom.

CHAP. XI.

INCREASE OF PAPAL AUTHORITY. — STATE OF THE CHURCH IN THE EAST. — RISE OF MAHOMETANISM. — INCREASE OF SUPERSTITIOUS PRACTICES AMONG CHRISTIANS. — THEODORUS OF CANTERBURY. — HERESIES. — COLLISION BETWEEN THE POPE AND THE EMPEROR. — COUNCIL IN TRULLO.

THE power and influence of the Roman see are henceforth to be contemplated as the predominant agents in the affairs of Christendom. As early as the third century, the bishops of Rome obtained from their brethren of the same order a degree of respectful attention, and were looked up to as presiding over a portion of the church, which by its extent and importance necessarily bestowed a species of civil influence on its rulers. In the fourth century the effects of this circumstance began to appear in the ambitious projects, the pride and contentions, which characterised many of the Roman clergy, and led them to employ all the arts of practised politicians, in their struggles to obtain ecclesiastical preferment. The desperate contest between the rival candidates for the papal chair, Damasus and Ursicinus, was productive of consequences, in this comparatively primitive age of Christianity, as disgraceful as those which divided the church, from a similar cause, in its decline and darkness. But the ambition with which the honours of the church were sought was fully equalled by that with which their possessors laboured, in all their degrees, to augment them. With the more conscientious among the hierarchy the same objects were pursued from the notion that the increase of their power was the establishment of the faith; and thus all classes of the clergy, and men of every different disposition, became united in the furtherance of one great design. The zeal and ability with which they laboured was aided, as we

have seen, by the condition of other portions of the Christian world. They had two rivals or antagonists with which to contend—all the rest of the church, and the power of the state. The great advantage they possessed in their contest with the former, consisted in their being perfectly united; while those whom they opposed were divided into innumerable factions. In their struggles with the latter, they enjoyed all the advantage of a power animated with the vigour and determination of youth, contending with one in which were all the seeds of decay. By the period at which we are arrived the issue of the contest was no longer doubtful. The bishops of the dioceses in which their predecessors had exercised independent authority, and insisted, with little fear of contradiction, on the spiritual equality of all who enjoyed the episcopal rank, now evinced a servile readiness to obey the dictation of Rome. Every species of flattery was employed to win the favour of its pontiff. He was consulted as to the assembling of councils, and obeyed in their determinations. Titles were bestowed upon him which might have satisfied the most vain of Eastern potentates. His wisdom and authority were eulogised as the only safeguards of the faith, and his word was sufficient to deprive bishops of their sanctity, and churches of their creeds.

Gregory inherited a power thus acquired for him by four centuries of gradual, but certain, conquest over the order to which he belonged. And this power was rendered doubly important, by the corresponding success with which the authority of the state had been silently assailed, and made to succumb to that of the church. The true origin of the sovereign influence which the ecclesiastical potentates acquired over those of the empire may, from the first, be traced to the actual superiority of control which they exercised on the people. In proportion as the state lost its proper influence, the church acquired it. The strength which left the sceptre passed into the crosier; and the magnificence which had once made mankind bow with sub-

mission at the foot of the throne, now prostrated them with similar awe before the altar.

But it was not amid tranquillity that the church was thus advancing towards the height of its splendour. In the West, the continual conflicts between the Lombards and the states of Ravenna kept Italy in ceaseless confusion, draining it of its profuse wealth, and reducing the noblest of its inhabitants to a condition of comparative poverty. It was on Rome that the chief weight of these calamities fell; and the charity of Gregory is said to have been frequently exercised in saving the fallen nobles and their families from starvation. The oppression which was suffered by all classes from the cruelty and cupidity of the imperial officers cannot be better understood than from his pathetic exclamation, in writing to a friend. "We are better treated," says he, "by the enemies who kill us, than we are by the officers of the empire, who fill us with bitterness by their fraud and rapine. The more sincerely you love me, the more you should sympathise with me, obliged as I am to watch over the bishops, the clergy, the monasteries, and the people; to be on my guard against the surprises of enemies, and the malice of the governors."*

In the East, war and sedition spread their banners from the centre of Constantinople to the extreme limits of Persia and Arabia. The emperor Maurice, a prince of some virtue, but whose parsimony produced the effects of both cruelty and imprudence, was barbarously murdered by a faction, who immediately elevated to the vacant throne an ambitious, but unlettered, centurion. Historians have united in representing the usurper, Phocas, as a monster of barbarity and cowardice; but after the short reign of two years he was himself deposed and put to death by Heraclius, the exarch of Africa, who had boldly refused to pay him the honours of sovereignty.† The reign of this emperor lasted for more than thirty years; and his descendants retained

* Fleury.

† Gibbon, Decline and Fall.

possession of the throne till its very foundations were rooted up, and it fell. But from the commencement to the termination of his rule, the Persians kept his armies continually in the field; and some splendid triumphs, in the early part of his career, taught his people to hope that there was still enough valour in a sovereign to repress the insolence of their enemies. His son Constantine, who succeeded him, reigned but three months, and is supposed to have owed his death to the jealousy of his stepmother, the niece as well as the wife of his late father. Constans, his son, occupied the throne seventeen years, and then fell a victim, while bathing at Syracuse, to the indignation of those who had suffered from his avaricious and tyrannous oppressions. The reign of his son, Constantine Pogonatus, with whom were associated in title, but not in power, his younger sons, Tiberius and Heraclius, was less disgraceful and tumultuous. His love of peace induced him to enter into treaties with the principal enemies of the empire; and at his instance a council was assembled at Constantinople, to provide some remedy, if possible, for the distracted condition of the church. But the benefit which might have accrued from these pacific measures was dissipated by the violent proceedings of his son and successor, Justinian II. The vices and luxury of this abandoned prince seem only to have been exceeded by the barbarity of his ministers. A base contrivance, however, to rid himself of one of the victims of his tyranny, the brave Leontius, precipitated him from his throne. The captive had scarcely been freed from his imprisonment, and ordered to embark, with pretended honours, to take possession of the government of Greece, when he suddenly turned upon the tyrant, and, at the head of the assembled populace, condemned him, after mutilating his face, to perpetual exile in the extremity of Scythia. He had not been long there, when another revolution took place at Constantinople; and, after a series of bold adventures, the exiled emperor

succeeded in reaching again the gates of Constantinople, and re-establishing himself on the throne.

These were the events amid which the church had to support itself, and through the stormy succession of which it was carried, by the policy and perseverance of its potentates, to that state of external grandeur, and apparent power, in which we are about to see it flourishing. But there are few periods in its history more barren of events than the present century. The sources of error had been set running in their various channels, and were now pursuing their quiet course through the world. Nestorianism, and its opposite systems, flourished with increasing prosperity throughout Persia and Arabia. The seeds which the disciples of Pelagius had sown in France and England promised a plentiful harvest in those countries. Arianism held possession of all that portion of Italy which acknowledged the sway of the Lombards; and even Manicheism, fostered by the rising sect of the Paulicians, still possessed a place among the heresies of the Christian church.

But it was in this century that the grandest experiment was made which had ever been tried by human genius or human power. The name of Mahomet, in its simple historical relation to the annals of the world, is invested with a splendour which it is not necessary that either reason or piety should endeavour to diminish. Enthusiasm, united with that rarest of its accompaniments, profound sagacity; an imagination as excursive as it was vivid, controlled continually by the most admirable faculty of calculation; courage over which the loftiest exploits of the greatest heroes cast no shadow; and a power of appreciating moral excellence, which, considering his age and country, was the noblest of all his endowments, formed the chief features in the character of this renowned and most remarkable man. The difficulties he had to overcome in the establishment of his design were such as no one less gifted than himself could have vanquished; and when we see him at the last

commanding by his nod the tens of thousands whom he had won by his eloquence, or conquered by his sword, we feel a deeper astonishment than we had ever before experienced, at the power with which the human mind can conceive, and at the fearlessness with which it can carry into execution the boldest and the most improbable of projects.

On looking, however, at the circumstances under which he commenced his career, we perceive evident traces of the existence of that one qualification in their character, — that essential condition to the success of all human enterprises, — a tendency which must have been partly manifest to all, still more manifest to his keen, enthusiastic glance, and partly concealed, but still inherent in the state of things, — a tendency to produce those effects to which he gave an immediate existence, and which he modified and imbued with the workings of his own individual mind. His countrymen needed a religious system and a lawgiver. The path for military conquest was laid open by the unsettled state of the neighbouring nations; and the decay which had loosened their political supports having given the appearance of a speedy termination to their various systems of belief, there was a strong temptation held out for the creation of new systems, — a temptation which has led, in other times and countries, to similar, but never, at least in modern ages, to such momentous results. It was destined for Mahomet to make the experiment of what might be effected by human means under favourable circumstances, and by a mind in every way adapted for the experiment, towards establishing a new religion. Both the Christian and the philosopher contemplate the issue with the highest interest. The one sees all the motives for which he before cherished his holy faith in a stronger light than ever; the other discovers, from the comparison of the two systems in their origin, the most powerful test that could be obtained for the trial of a religion professing to be divine. Mahomet effected more than was ever effected by any other of our race;

but he broke not down the slightest of the barriers which separate that which is divine from what is human. He stands foremost among men, but not nearer any higher nature than the meanest of his race ; and this grand distinction between what he did and what Christ did, between his character and that of the Saviour, is apparent through every portion of their respective histories. Mahomet did all that man could, — Christ did all that God saw it necessary to do.

But while the systems of the divine, and the human and false teacher are thus essentially opposed, it is obvious to the least attentive reader of history, that in so far as the church of Christ had exposed itself to the influence of external circumstances the success of Mahomet had an important effect upon its condition. The apparent fate of the whole East depended, after a few years, on the determinations of Mahomet's followers and successors. The factions even which divided the church sought with the most anxious care to obtain the favour of the Mahometan chiefs ; and the Monophysites, with various other sectarians who had retreated into Persia and Arabia, found there a safe and welcome asylum from the power and interference of the orthodox. Mahomet himself died in the year 632 ; but he had so well established his opinions in the breasts of his followers that they were now proof against any assailant. What was, perhaps, still more important, he had laid the foundations of an empire in that enthusiasm and fidelity of his disciples. Their attachment had been put to an immediate trial ; their ardour was not allowed to spend itself in empty professions : their faith was converted into a sword, the keenness and temper of which were on the instant to be tried. The success of Mahomet's wars might well appear, in the eyes of his followers, as a proof of his divine commission. It was with the pretence of authority from God that he led them into battle : every means was employed to impress them with this idea ; and when, urged on by the ardour it inspired, they found themselves conquerors, the natural

result to their minds would be the most powerful conviction that all which their leader had told them was the truth. When the religion was left to the support of men less gifted than Mahomet himself, it was hedged round with civil authority. It did not depend even on the courage of its professors; and by degrees every law which had at first been only venerated as the emanation of a divine spirit became as the law of a well-ordered and well-established state, and was obeyed as much from custom and necessity as from religion. The first two successors of Mahomet pursued a course in every way fitted to effect this important purpose. While by their valour they extended the boundaries of their dominion, they secured the respect and affection of their subjects by an unvaried diligence in the execution of justice, and the most generous sacrifice of personal vanity and display. Aboubeker, who was acknowledged chief of the faithful immediately on the death of Mahomet, distributed every Friday the money of the treasury among his people, reserving for himself only barely sufficient to provide the humblest food: but this same man led the way to the conquest of Persia and Syria; and though he was sixty years of age when he began to reign, and died at the end of two years from his elevation, he left the nation in a state which enabled his successor Omar to secure the possession of a large portion of Persia; to expel the Romans from Egypt and Syria; to plant his banners on the walls of Damascus, and make Jerusalem the chief city of his kingdom. Alexandria sustained a siege of fourteen months, but was at length taken; and the learned of every subsequent age have had to deplore, through that event, the loss of the noblest collection of books that the world had ever seen. To the application made by a learned Eutychian for the grant of this collection, as one of no use to the conquerors, Amron, the general of the army, returned for answer, that he could not dispose of it without the consent of the caliph Omar. The caliph was accordingly applied to; and his answer was dictated

by that rude policy which was to be looked for in such a chief. "If," said he, "the contents of these books agree with the Book of God, the Book of God still suffices us; and if they contain any thing contrary to this book, we have no need of them." Amron knew how to interpret this reply; and the 4000 baths of the city were during six months employed for the burning of the most precious relics of ancient wisdom.

It is a melancholy reflection that the triumphs thus rapidly gained by Mahomet and his successors were promoted by the fatal dissensions of the Christians; and it is a circumstance not unworthy of notice, that the first check which the victorious Mussulmans received in their career sprung from similar dissensions among themselves. Had their strength not been thus in some degree abridged, it is impossible to say where their career would have stopped. As it was, we have soon to contemplate the empire of the East, with its evangelised provinces, its Christian cities filled with temples to the Redeemer, and its lordly capital, the seat of the first monarchs who ruled in the name of Christ, in the hands of these believers in a false prophet, and forming an integral part in the dominion of imposture and superstition.

But the peril in which the church was placed, by the new enemy thus rising against it, was unheeded amid the conflicts of ambition and jealousy which ravaged its borders, and shook the pillars on which, so far as man was concerned, it had been founded. At first, controversy was the business of only a few bold and unsettled minds, or of those who, endowed with more than ordinary energy, and a deep love of truth, deemed it their duty to stand forward in defence of a pure faith. By the period of which we are now speaking, the moral elements of the Christian world had become saturated, as it were, with error, and error is a fruitful parent of doubt; which it produces not simply in the minds of those who own her sway, but in those who stand by and witness the results of her

influence. Had there not been causes at work, therefore, which plunged the great body of the people deeper and deeper in ignorance, there is the strongest reason for believing that Christendom would have shortly been split into innumerable fragments, each characterised by some principle destructive of its properties as a part of the general mass. During this and the next century, the careful observer will discover the contest which was thus carried on between heresy and superstition ; a contest indicative of the intellectual state of the world at that period, when the minds of men, having been long tampered with, were fast sinking into lethargy. It now began to be found that they might be satisfied with symbols instead of truth itself ; and thus, while the cross of Christ was set up to be worshipped or contemplated instead of Christ, the inventions of human ingenuity, the supposed means and supports of knowledge, were in a similar manner substituted for the gospel. “ Deliver your souls from punishment while you have the remedies in your power ” was the exclamation of one of the chief men of the age. “ Offer oblations and tithes to the churches, and exhibit, according to your means, lights in the holy places.” The exercise of repentance, that simple grace of the gospel, which carries him who feels it at once to the cross of the Redeemer, was confined within the rules of a system : books were written to explain by what steps the soul might advance to innocence ; and at each stage of its progress it was to give some manifestation of its obedience to the church.

It was to Theodorus, a Greek monk, but, at the time he wrote the work alluded to, archbishop of Canterbury, that the western church was indebted for a collection of canons respecting penitence. Besides the rules which relate to penance, there are others given for the instruction of newly baptized persons, and for all who may have especial occasion to exercise repentance. The niceties which were mingled up with the most important subjects to which Christians could have to attend, may be un-

derstood from the order which was given, that persons newly baptized should wear a veil for eight days after the ceremony, and that only a priest should remove it. Regulations are also published concerning the oblations to be made for the dead, which it was declared ought not to be offered without fasting. In respect to the church, it is laid down as a rule, that the *sacrifice* is not to be celebrated in a place where infidels have been buried; that there ought not to be steps to the altars where there are relics of saints; that unless the church be poor, there should be a lamp burning before them every night; that frankincense ought to be offered on the festivals of the saints; that laymen are not to read the lessons in the church, nor sing the Hallelujah. The orders given respecting the bishops and priests, and what it is lawful for them to do, affords further light on the state of the clergy, and illustrates a fact of some importance, namely, that the administrators of religious mysteries were now supposed to exercise, by their personal characters, an influence on the sacraments they administered. Thus the baptism which had been given by a priest guilty of some gross immorality was considered null, and the person who had received it was to be re-baptized. The sacrifice of the mass was not to be taken from a priest incapable of reading the lessons and performing the ceremonies. In the distinctions laid down respecting the different orders of the clergy, the deacons receive permission to baptize, and to bless meat and drink. The presbyters, according to the established practice of all ages, are alone allowed to consecrate the elements and bless the people; it is added, also, in respect to them, that they are not bound to pay tithes, and that they ought not to publish abroad the faults of their bishop. Of the prelate himself, it is said, that he may confirm in the fields; that he may judge the causes of poor men when the sum in dispute does not exceed fifty pence; and that he cannot force an abbot to attend a synod without a sufficient cause.

Among the miscellaneous customs, particular mention

is made of the rites performed for the dead. It hence appears that, with the Latins, it was the custom for the monks to carry the deceased to the church, to anoint the breast with oil, and then, having said mass over them, to proceed to the grave. Masses were also to be said for them on the first, third, and thirtieth day, and at the end of the year : lay persons were to say these masses on the third, ninth, and thirtieth day, and to fast for the space of a week : in regard to children, masses were not to be said for them unless they were seven years old : and with respect to wicked men, sacrifice was to be offered for them if they died in the communion of the church. One entire chapter of the Penitential is taken up with rules relating to those who were possessed with the devil, or who killed themselves. If before they became possessed they were pious members of the church, they might be prayed for ; but if the possession followed some violent passion of despair, or other similar affection, then they were not to receive that advantage. Prayers and alms might be offered for persons guilty of suicide, but not mass, which was only said by the most charitable, even for those who put themselves to death while labouring under insanity.

A stronger proof could not be given of the power enjoyed by the monastic orders, and of the unscriptural sentiments they propagated, than what is said in the eleventh section of the Penitential on the subject of marriage. It is there asserted, that “ a lawful marriage cannot be dissolved except with the consent of both parties,” but that either of them may give consent for the other to withdraw into a monastery, and that then the other may marry again. A principle of this kind would, it is evident, strike at the root of marriage institutions, and by leaving it in the power of the enthusiastic to dissolve the contract on the plea of religion, would tempt the vicious or the discontented to employ the same plea from feelings of a far different nature.

Theodorus was not the only writer in this century

who took the pains to draw up rules of discipline and penance. He had been preceded by Columbanus, an Irish monk, who, after having preached in France and Switzerland, and suffered persecution from the warlike princes of those countries, ended his days in Italy. The fundamental principle of his rule is the love of God and man ; and on this he establishes many precepts well calculated to secure the higher ends he had in view as the founder of a monastery. But there are some for which no reason can be assigned but the prevalence of the idea that the employment of personal severity was the best mode of inculcating piety. Thus it is ordained in his Penitential, that any of the monks who omitted to say *Amen* at table should receive six lashes ; that the same punishment should be inflicted on those who talked in the refectory ; who did not refrain from coughing at the commencement of a psalm ; who touched the chalice with their teeth, or smiled during the service. The still weightier punishment of fifty stripes were assigned to their who should speak roughly or with petulance ; and the same to him who should answer or contradict his superior.

But distressing as it is to find how far the church had degenerated in matters of discipline from the original simplicity of its rites, it is yet more so to see, from some of the authors of this century, that the custom was now prevalent of filling theological treatises with the most extravagant falsehoods. Thus in a work entitled *The Spiritual Meadow*, written by a monk named Joannes Moschus, who had travelled in the East, stories are related which vie in absurdity and extravagance with the wildest brought from the same countries in the days of the crusades. One of his narratives purports, that a certain friar having pronounced the sentence of consecration on some bread he had brought as an offering to the altar, the priest, whose proper office it was to consecrate them, found, to his surprise, that the Holy Ghost did not, as he had been wont, descend upon the sacrifice. But in the mean while an angel

warned him of the previous consecration; and the priest, thus informed of what the friar had done, ordered that in future no one should learn the form of consecration but those who had to celebrate the rite. In another place, it is said, that there was a monk, who, in order to convert one of his brethren from heresy, had shown him several heretics in a place of the most fearful torment. To the same purport it is related, that a monk who followed the rule of the Stylites, and was of the orthodox party, once sent to another monk of the same class, but a Severian, for some communion bread. On receiving the portion he desired, he threw it into boiling water, and it was soon dissolved; but a morsel of the bread which had been consecrated by Catholics being dropped into the same water, it remained entire, and the water became immediately cool. Another of the stories is, that a friar, who had passed a wicked life, was seen after his death by an old man sunk in a terrible fire up to the neck, and that he told the old man it was only owing to the efficacy of his prayers for him that his head was not also enveloped in the flames.

It was by such inventions as these that the doctrines which for so long a period choked the seed of the gospel were established among the rude and benighted multitude. If they were alarmed by such relations from indulging heretical notions, they paid all knowledge of the truth as the price of their protection from error: if they were frightened by such methods from pursuing a life of crime, they were condemned, in order to be innocent, to yield up their liberty as moral and rational beings. But it can never be fairly shown that the engines of superstition produced even that partial good which it is sometimes supposed they effected. Immorality in its grossest forms, error in its darkest, most degrading influences, have ever appeared simultaneously with superstition; and it would be little consistent with any principles of reasoning to attribute a

modifying influence for good to the first chief cause of the evil.

Happily, however, for mankind, Christianity was not without its supporters even in these days of darkness. God still continued to pour the light of truth into the souls of many; and the gift was not bestowed in vain. Amid the mass of writers who only strove to establish the modern inventions of the ascetics, or to support the church against heresy, by involving it in darkness, we here and there meet with one whose pure and elevated sentiments bear testimony to the extent of his scriptural knowledge. Of this number was the excellent Chrodebert, archbishop of Tours, whose decision respecting the true object and nature of penitence is worth more than volumes of monastic rules on the subject. On being consulted respecting a person who had committed some sin, but was penitent, he advised his clergy to consider that passage in the gospel in which it is said, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much;" and deduced therefrom the valuable principle, that, in judging of penitence, regard ought chiefly to be paid to the signs exhibited of an earnest love towards God, and of fear at the danger of again falling into sin. His favourite maxim was, that humility avails much with God, and that charity can effect all things. Sins, he used also to say, may be compared to wood, hay, stubble, which are combustible matters, and may be consumed by the fire of divine love, which will call up in their place those evangelical virtues which are compared to gold, silver, and precious stones; the conversion and cure of the soul consisting in a change of love; for as the love of sin was its ruling passion till conversion took place, so the love of God, after that event, becomes the universal principle of its determinations. "The sinner," said he, "must die to the affections of that which he formerly loved, which he cannot do till he begin to love that which he before did not love. The inner man must be renewed, that the

body of sin may be destroyed, that we who are dead to the present world, and crucified with Christ, may no longer be the servants of sin ; according to the precept, ‘ Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies, but let the Saviour reign in them,’ which is nothing else but that the reign of love should be established in us by grace. Let us hear,” he continued, “ what St. Paul, who was inspired by the Spirit of God, teaches us on this point, when he says, ‘ Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin ; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God ;’ that is to say, according to the interpretation of St. Augustine, ‘ as, when you have sinned, it has not been fear which induced you to it, but pleasure, and the unholy love of evil, so must it not be fear of punishment which constrains you to live according to the rules of justice, but virtuous delight, and the love of holiness.’”

In the sermons also attributed to Eligius*, who was elevated to the bishopric of Noyon about the middle of this century, there are many precepts of a similar evangelical tendency, and the effect of which must have been to retard, in proportion to their influence, the evil consequences of the growing superstitions. It is thus he warned his people against the false notion that they could obtain forgiveness of sins by any other means than that of a genuine repentance. “ If,” saith he, “ ye repent after a godly sort, and be fully resolved, and earnestly anxious to sin no more, ye shall be truly reconciled by Jesus Christ, and by us to whom he hath committed the ministry. But if such be not your disposition, do not flatter or deceive yourselves, for ye cannot deceive God as ye deceive men ; and he who is become his enemy by sinning, can no otherwise be restored to his friendship without making him satisfaction. Do not look upon bishops as the authors of your reconciliation, but merely as the ministers of it. It is Jesus Christ

* Du Pin. Bibliot. Pat. VII. Cent.

who doth invisibly absolve and reconcile men. As for us we discharge our ministry when we do outwardly and visibly perform the ceremonies of reconciliation; nevertheless he comforts those even who have not repented thoroughly, giving them hope that, provided they forsake their sins heartily, they may obtain forgiveness, and be truly reconciled." In the same manner he says, that those who exhibit the most violent external signs of penitence must be persuaded that "they shall not receive absolution of their crimes, if the divine goodness do not pardon them, bestowing on their souls the grace of contrition; because, as St. Gregory says, the bishop's absolution is then only true, when it is agreeable with the judgment of Him who judges the secrets of the hearts, as figured by the resurrection of Lazarus, whom Christ raised to life first, before he ordered his disciples to loose him. And thus, all pastors must be careful to loose and absolve none but those whose souls Christ hath quickened again by his grace."

With these truly apostolic precepts are mingled others which partake strongly of the errors that were beginning to prevail in the church. The doctrine of transubstantiation seems to be implied in these words, which can scarcely admit of that spiritual interpretation applied to others of a similar but less distinct character:—"Know ye, my dear brethren," he says, "and firmly believe, that as the flesh which Jesus Christ took in the Virgin's womb is his true body, which was offered up for our salvation, so, likewise, the bread which he gave his disciples, and which the priests consecrate daily in the church, is the true body of Christ. They are not two bodies; it is the same body which is broken and sacrificed. This is Jesus Christ, which is broken and sacrificed, though he remains sound and whole." Taken by themselves, these expressions might be considered as intended to convey only that sound doctrine of Christ's spiritual presence which is necessary to the efficacy of the Lord's supper as a means of grace. But when viewed in connection with other opinions of the age, and

with the numerous superstitious practices which now formed so great a part of the public worship, little doubt can be entertained that they pointed at that doctrine so likely to interest a badly educated people, and so favourable to the purposes of an ambitious priesthood,—the doctrine of transubstantiation.

Contemporary with these writers was Julian, archbishop of Toledo, from whose works we may derive additional light in examining the state of doctrine and discipline in this century. The principal production of Julian was a Treatise on Prognostics, divided into three books; in which he treats respectively of death, of the state of the soul after death, and of the judgment and resurrection. In his reflections on the first of these subjects, he says, that the word *mors* is derived from *morsu*, because Adam became mortal from eating the forbidden fruit; that though death is not good, it is yet beneficial to the just; that one of great pain is followed by remission of sin; and that angels assist the just in their last hours, while the devils lie in wait for them. With respect to the state of the soul after death, he supposes that those who are perfect in righteousness are immediately carried into paradise, where they exist in peace, and joyfully await the resurrection of the body; that the less perfect are not so soon admitted into happiness; and that neither the one nor the other, though they even now see God, and reign with Christ, enjoy, in that separate state, so full and perfect a vision of Deity as they will do after the resurrection. The wicked, he says, are, immediately on dying, precipitated into hell, where they are destined to endure eternal misery; and he supposes that there is a real fire, in which sins are expiated; and that the period which the soul remains in it is determined by the number and greatness of its crimes. Of the dead he further says, that they know each other; that they pray for the living, but not for the damned; that they know what takes place upon earth, pity their friends, desire men's salvation, and sometimes appear

to the living ; but that the damned are only allowed to see some of the blessed.

In the chapter on the judgment and resurrection, he states, that neither the time nor the place of the last judgment, nor the period of its duration, can be discovered ; but, employing the occasional mention of it made in Scripture, he supposes that Christ will appear descending from heaven, carrying his cross, and accompanied with the angelic hosts : that even the elect will tremble when they behold Him ; but that the fear they feel will purify them from sin ; that the wicked will be confounded with dismay ; that the saints shall be united with Christ in the judging of the world ; that all men will rise again in a moment, and, putting on a new but real and fleshly body, will appear of a perfect age, and in perfect beauty, no longer subject to decay, and retaining no vestige of any defect or mutilation : that in the separation which will take place between the righteous and the ungodly, the latter will be hurled headlong into an abyss, where they will be exposed to fires that shall torment but never consume them ; that all, however, will not be punished alike, the lightest of penalties being laid upon those who were guilty only through original sin : that as soon as the just shall have received their appointed reward, the earth will be set on fire, and that there will then be “ a new heaven and a new earth ;” in the latter of which the redeemed will have their habitation, but with perfect liberty to ascend into heaven : that they will see God as he is now seen by angels ; that being wholly free from sin, they will enjoy a most perfect liberty, and, though their happiness will differ in degree, according to their advancement in righteousness, that they will all derive their felicity from the love of God, and the contemplation of his glory.

It deserves to be remarked, that several of the articles in the work of Julian relate particularly to the future state ; and there appears to have been a strong tendency, in all the theology of the period, to engage

the minds of men on topics of that nature. A surer sign, perhaps, could scarcely be discovered of the corruption of Christian doctrine. The gospel reveals no particulars respecting the future condition of the saints. Faith demands of believers not simply an assent to divine truth, but a perfect trust in divine goodness; and when the latter is exercised, there can be no anxiety, and little curiosity, concerning what will be the rewards, or in what will consist the happiness of the redeemed. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for:" it neither weakens the natural desire of the human mind for happiness, nor lessens its interest in whatever relates to a future state, but it answers all enquiries, and satisfies all yearnings, by pointing to the fountains of divine love, as the sufficient source of good in every conceivable state of existence.

Of the other writers who flourished about the same time, two require to be mentioned: — the one, because he contributed to introduce the custom of abridging the systems of theology written by the great fathers of the church; the other, because of the conspicuous part he took, both by his writings and his sufferings, in the controversies of the age. Taio, who was bishop of Saragossa about the middle of this century, made a complete abstract of all the opinions propounded in the works of St. Gregory. In this abstract he has avoided giving any of the arguments by which other distinguished writers have illustrated the same doctrines, with the exception of those of St. Augustine. The work has little to recommend it; but the plan which it favoured, of teaching divinity by definitions and sentences, was productive of the worst consequences: it was one of the main causes which led to the corruption of doctrine, and the increase of the darkness which was every where beginning to prevail.* Theology, of all other studies, is that in which the ease of the mind ought least to be consulted, and the mere power of memory assigned any conspicuous place. But such was the eagerness with which

* Mabillon, *Vetera Analecta*, p. 64.

abstracts were sought, that, in a comparatively brief period, not only the works of the fathers were dispensed with, but the Scriptures themselves. The far-famed master of sentences was venerated and studied, when evangelists and apostles were remembered only by name; and we may trace the beginning of this wretched state of learning to the period of which we are speaking. Taio received from his contemporaries the most unbounded praises. His work was regarded as one of the noblest gifts which the pious industry of the theologian could bestow; and epithets were applied to him which would have been extravagant if bestowed on men of the most undoubted talent.

Maximus, surnamed the Confessor; Ildefonse, the author of a treatise entitled "*De Cognitione Baptismi*;" Paterius, who wrote a commentary on the Old and New Testaments on the basis of the works of St. Gregory; and some other authors of the same class, may still be usefully consulted by the careful student of ecclesiastical history, as affording the least questionable medium through which to judge of these remote times. But they all bear evidence to the same melancholy truth,—that the light of reason and religion was every day waxing fainter; that the holy sanctions, which should be reserved to establish the weightiest precepts of the moral law, were losing their venerable grandeur by being applied to uphold the most insignificant of rites; and that in proportion as the priesthood became less evangelical in doctrine, and less pure and simple in the modes of instructing the church, it became more desirous of oppressing the people with ambitious and expensive institutions.

The decisions of the councils which were held at this period, offer another means for our judging of the state of opinion and discipline in the church. Of these decisions we may consider, first, those which respected points of doctrine; and, next, those which had reference only to rites and ceremonies. In regard to the former, we find the controversy respecting the mode in which

the divine persons of the Trinity exist together still agitating, though under modified forms, a large portion of the Christian community. The rise and progress of Monothelism present us with the same afflicting scenes as those we have already contemplated in the narrative of the Arian and Eutychian controversies ; but sickness, in a mature and close-knit frame, has often a more fatal effect than on one of less settled growth ; and the schisms and heresies of old established communities frequently produce worse injuries than result from similar disputes in newer societies. Monothelism, by which word is signified a oneness of will, had its commencement with Sergius, the patriarch of Constantinople. Strongly inclined in favour of the Eutychian system, but obliged by his situation to refrain from an open profession of those doctrines, he formed the notion, that could it be established as an article of faith that Christ had but one will, the great mass of those who were now branded as heretics, and driven from the bosom of the church, might again be admitted into communion with the orthodox.* In this idea he was confirmed by the circumstances of the church, and the wishes of the emperor Heraclius. That monarch, it is said, had, during the Persian war, held a conference with some of the chief persons among the Nestorians, who had submitted to a voluntary exile in order to preserve their faith.* From them he learnt, that they would willingly yield their assent to the decisions of the council of Chalcedon, if, as a corollary to those decrees, it were added, that after the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, there was but one will, and one operation. Sergius brought all the learning he possessed to elucidate this doctrine : adduced the authority of St. Cyril and other fathers in confirmation of its orthodoxy ; and soon succeeded in rendering the emperor a firm and zealous supporter of the system. His next step was to make this new method of conciliation and union known to the

* Basnage, *Histoire de l'Eglise*, liv. x. c. vii. Fleury. Mosheim, cent. vii. part ii. c. 5.

heads of the different parties ; and he had shortly the satisfaction of obtaining the warm co-operation of Cyrus, patriarch of Alexandria, and Athanasius, chief of the Jacobites, who obtained thereby the patriarchy of Antioch. The example of these prelates was soon followed by others ; and the plan formed by Heraclius and his ecclesiastical advisers seemed on the point of being achieved. Few persons had either the inclination or the courage to oppose the edict which the emperor published, supported as he thus was by the most eminent men of the eastern church ; and the patriarch of Alexandria, seeing affairs in a proper state for a still more decided measure, drew up an instrument to confirm the yet wavering opinions of the exiled dissidents. By the seventh article of this formulary it was declared, that there was only one operation in Christ's person ; and the Jacobites, with others, immediately re-united themselves to the church. This took place in the year 633 ; but a check was now given to the further progress of the heresy. Sophronius, a monk of Syria, and whose zeal as well as knowledge had been increased by a long intercourse with the pious anchorites of Palestine, was the first to arise and enter his protest against the proceedings of the Monothelites. At Alexandria he besought Cyrus, with every expression of the most earnest sorrow, not to pursue a course so destructive of the orthodox faith ; but his entreaties were without effect, and he proceeded to Constantinople, where he employed the same means with Sergius, and to as little purpose : his abilities and perseverance, however, prevented his exertions from being regarded with indifference ; and the patriarch of Constantinople, in writing to pope Honorius on the subject of Monothelism, deemed it necessary to name him with respect.

The letter in which Sophronius was thus mentioned, contained a full explication of the views which Sergius and his coadjutors were ostensibly employed in establishing. It was couched in the most careful terms, and was replete with declarations of a lively desire to

promote peace and union. Sophronius was made to appear as the chief cause of the disputes which had arisen, and as offering opposition to one of the wisest plans that could have been invented for the security of the church. Honorius, distant as he was from the scene of contention, and wanting sufficient information or acuteness to discover the exact state of the question, might have been led, by the letter of Sergius, to give his assent to the measures he was pursuing, even had he been little inclined to admit the doctrine they were intended to establish. "We have learnt," said he, in his reply, "that there have been some disputes and new questions concerning words introduced by a certain Sophronius against our brother Cyrus, bishop of Alexandria, who teaches converted heretics that there is but one operation in Jesus Christ. We confess only one will in Jesus Christ." He further added, "We do not see that either the Scriptures or the councils authorise us to teach one or two operations; and it is, in other respects, a question only for grammarians to determine." *

Things were in this state when Sophronius was appointed bishop of Jerusalem. Possessed thereby of greater authority and influence than he before enjoyed, his first measure was the assembling of a council for the discussion of the much agitated controversy. He addressed at the same time a letter to Sergius, with a confession of his faith, and numerous arguments in proof of the correctness of his views. This letter was laid before Honorius, but produced no other effect than that of inducing him to write a second time to Sergius, and desire that the dispute might be silenced, as arising from the introduction of dangerous novelties. The pious bishop of Jerusalem, however, ceased not his exertions; and collected from the writings of the fathers 600 passages in support of his opinions. Nor did he stop here. Taking one day his friend, the bishop of Dora, to the summit of Mount Calvary, he thus solemnly

* Fleury. Hist. Eccles. xxxvii, 44.

addressed him : — “ You will be accountable to Him who was crucified on this sacred spot, when He comes to judge the quick and the dead, if you disregard the danger in which the church now stands. Perform the duty, then, which the incursions of the Saracens prevent my doing in person. Hasten from this remote corner of the earth to present yourself before the apostolic chair, the seat of the holy faith ; make known to the sacred persons there what is taking place, and cease not your prayers till they judge this new doctrine, and canonically condemn it.” *

The bishop of Dora, it is said, was deeply moved by this address, which was seconded by the entreaties of several eminent supporters of orthodoxy : he, therefore prepared himself for the journey ; and after having escaped a variety of dangers to which he was exposed, through the machinations of the Monothelites, he arrived at Rome. Honorius died either shortly before, or soon after his arrival ; and it is probable that Stephen succeeded in obtaining the attention of the new pope, Severian, as we find that pontiff resisting the measures which Heraclius had formed to re-establish tranquillity. It is not uninteresting to observe the conduct of sovereigns who meddle with religious affairs. If they begin as controversialists, they usually end as dictators ; and having fomented disputes, which in their progress become dangerous, resume the sceptre to crush the unruly spirits who refuse their decisions. The emperor, on the occasion in question, had recourse to a method which in those days of controversy must have been received with singular unwillingness by many. Anxious to put an immediate and total stop to the agitation of the Monothelite question, he published an edict known by the title of the *Ecthesis*. This instrument, of which Sergius was the author, consisted of an exposition of the faith, but under the appearance of orthodoxy, and the express declaration, that the unity of the will and operation was to be no longer the subject of dispute,

* Fleury. *Hist. Eccles.* xxxviii. 6.

contained an evident assertion of the truth of that doctrine. Sergius died soon after the publication of this edict ; but it was supported by his successor Pyrrhus, and several of the eastern bishops. The Roman pontiff, on the other hand, opposed it in the most decided manner ; and John IV., as also his successor Theodorus, formally condemned it.

The heads of the eastern and western churches were in this state of enmity, when Heraclius, by his death, in March, 641, left the imperial throne to his son Constantine : that monarch survived his elevation but four months, and was succeeded by Constans, who immediately took an active part in the affairs of the church. Pyrrhus was deposed on account of his unpopularity, and retired into Africa, the vacant dignity being conferred on Paul, who, like the exiled patriarch, was a zealous Monothelite. An attempt was made by pope Theodorus to re-instate Pyrrhus, who expressed some desire to renounce Monothelism : but it failed ; and Constans, with the advice of Paul, set aside the *Ecthesis*, and published a new edict, to which he gave the name of the *Type*, and wherein the strictest orders are repeated against any further disputation on the subject of the one will and operation.* “ We forbid,” was the language of this celebrated instrument, “ any of our catholic subjects from disputing in future, in any form whatever, respecting the one or two wills. We desire them to abide by the Holy Scriptures, the five œcumenical councils, and those writings of the fathers whose doctrine is the rule of the church, without either adding to, or taking from them, or attempting to explain them according to private opinion, but allowing things to remain in the same state in which they were before the commencement of these disputes, and as if they had never been agitated.”

Tranquillity was far from being the consequence of this proceeding. Theodorus, who died the following year, was succeeded by Martin I. ; the earliest act of

* Basnage. Fleury.

whose pontificate was the calling of a council to condemn the principles of the Monothelites, and the late acts of the emperors. The assembly held its first session October 5th, 649; and one of the notaries having called upon the pope to declare for what purpose the council had been summoned, he replied, that "it was to oppose the novelties and errors published by Cyrus, bishop of Alexandria, and Sergius, bishop of Constantinople; and which had been defended by the successors of the latter, Pyrrhus and Paul: that eighteen years before, Cyrus had published nine articles in Alexandria, pronouncing anathemas against such as should reject them, and asserting the doctrine of one operation only in Christ, as well of his Godhead as of his Manhood: that Sergius had approved this opinion in a letter to Cyrus, and had confirmed it since, by making, under the name of the emperor Heraclius, an heretical exposition of the faith. From this doctrine," he added, "it would follow, that there is but one will and one nature in Jesus Christ, the holy fathers having acknowledged, that when there is but one operation there is also but one nature." He then adduces the testimony of Basil, Cyril, and Leo, to the truth of the doctrine, that the two natures in Christ have each of them their distinct operations. "Sergius," he stated, "had opposed this article of the Christian creed in the exposition of faith which he had drawn up for the emperor; and Pyrrhus and Paul," he continued, "had contributed to increase and confirm the evil." Of the former of these prelates he remarked, that "he had indeed renounced his error, and presented a recantation to the holy see, but had soon after relapsed into heresy; and that Paul had not only maintained this error in an epistle addressed to the holy see, but had opposed the sound doctrine by other writings; had induced the emperor to promulgate a new exposition of the faith called the Type; had taken away the altar consecrated in the church of St. Placidia; had hindered the *Apocrisarii* of the Roman church from offering upon it; and had persecuted them and several

bishops, some of whom he had driven into banishment. Complaints," he added, "had been made to the holy see respecting these things; and both he and his predecessors had used letters, advertisements, threatenings, and protestations, to repress those novelties, and re-establish sound doctrine: but all these efforts having proved unavailing, he had deemed it necessary to assemble his brethren, in order that, after having produced and examined the writings of the heretics, and heard the charges brought against them, they might pass their judgment for the confirmation of the truth, and the overthrow of error."

This address was listened to with the attention which the importance of the subject, and the dignity of the speaker, demanded. Several bishops, of which order not less than 105 members were present, next addressed the assembly, and declared their approbation of the pontiff's sentiments. On the 8th of October, the council again met, and received the petition of Stephen of Dora. In this document he alludes to the conduct of Sergius and the other fomenters of the schism, and set forth the pious attempts of Sophronius, now no more, to stop the progress of the dispute. Several Greek monks and presbyters supported him in his accusation of the heretics; and before the conclusion of the session, letters were read from four African bishops who protested with similar zeal against the Monothelite doctrines. The third and fourth sessions of the council were employed in a similar manner; and in the fifth and last, which was held on the 31st of October, twenty articles were drawn up against the heresy in question, and its authors, Theodorus, Cyrus, Sergius, Pyrrhus, and Paul, together with all such as should embrace their opinions, were formally anathematised.

The Roman pontiff was by this proceeding brought into immediate collision with the emperor; and the power of the greatest potentate of the church was thus measured with that of the highest in the state. In this respect the issue of the controversy deserves particular

note. Martin was a zealous and active churchman ; learned and conscientious ; strongly impressed with a sense of the importance of unity, and disposed to exercise the authority he possessed to the utmost in its favour. No sooner had the council given its decision, than he despatched letters to all orders of the clergy, acquainting them with the event, and with the acts it had passed. But the information which the emperor Constans received of these proceedings filled him with the most violent indignation ; and he at once resolved to punish the contempt with which his edict, and that of his predecessor, had been treated. He communicated his wishes to Calliopas, exarch of Italy, who soon after made the pontiff a prisoner, and conveyed him to the island of Naxos. For three months he was kept nearly continually on board a ship, and carried from one place to the other, without being allowed even the commonest necessaries of life. At Naxos he remained twelve months in captivity ; and was then taken to Constantinople, being exposed, during his passage thither, to a treatment which would have been cruel to a condemned malefactor. On his arrival, fresh indignities and barbarities awaited him. He was cast into a miserable prison, in which he lay apparently forgotten for more than three months, and when carried before the tribunal of justice was examined like a common criminal. The part he had taken in the late events, so far as they strictly pertained to religion, was not considered, even by his fiercest opponents, as involving a guilt sufficient to justify their severities. He was, therefore, arraigned as an enemy of the state. Twenty witnesses, of whom the greater part were soldiers, and who are said to have been bribed for the occasion, appeared as his accusers.*

Martin himself could not refrain from expressing surprise and indignation on seeing by whom he was to be judged : but his protestations were treated with contemptuous neglect ; and notwithstanding his earnest entreaty that the gospel might not be profaned by the

* Fleury. Hist. Eccles. lib. xxxix. 2.

oaths of such men, they were sworn on the holy evangelists, and called upon for their depositions. The accusations brought against him respecting his conduct in state affairs were unsupported by any fair or substantial evidence. He showed the inconsistency of the supposition that he had taken any part against the emperor in Italy with the known circumstances of his situation ; and refuted, throughout, the calumnies of his enemies. On his attempting, however, to speak on the subject of the Type, the prefect commanded him to be silent, observing, that they were not then discussing a point of doctrine but a state offence, and that there they were all Christians and orthodox ! “ Would to God it were so,” ejaculated Martin ; “ but at the day of judgment I shall bear testimony against you on that subject.”

This mockery of a trial being concluded, the pontiff was led from the council-chamber into a court, where he was kept some time surrounded by guards, as if, old and unfriended as he was, there could be need to fear his escape. He was next carried to an open terrace, where, exposed at once to the gaze of the emperor and the populace, the base servants of the court insulted him in so gross a manner, that even the multitude pitied his fate. His outward mantle having been torn off, the officers took him, and stripping off the best of his habits, left only his tunic remaining, which they next rent down on each side, from top to bottom. An iron collar was then fastened round his neck, and he was led from the palace through the midst of the city, chained to one of the keepers of the prison, and preceded by another, bearing the sword with which he was to be executed. As they dragged him along, his lacerated feet stained the pavement with blood ; and he presented an appearance of humiliation and misery which might well humble the spirits of the haughtiest churchmen of either Rome or Constantinople.

But his sufferings did not terminate here. Instead of being executed, as seems to have been first intended by his persecutors, he was carried back to prison ; and hav-

ing undergone another examination, was sent into the Chersonesus, where he lingered through four months of the severest hardship, borne with great meekness and fortitude, and then expired.

Martin was not the only victim of imperial intolerance and revenge. With him was associated in suffering as well as labours, the celebrated Maximus. This zealous defender of orthodoxy was a native of Constantinople, and held the office of secretary to the emperor Heraclius. But too fond of retirement to feel happy in a luxurious court, and of too devout a spirit to prefer wealth and rank to the preservation of his faith, he resigned his appointment, and took up his residence in the monastery of Chrysopolis, near Chalcedon. In this retreat he spent his time in the study of the Bible, and the writings of the fathers; and his piety and learning at length made him so venerable in the eyes of the brotherhood that he was elected abbot. But the disputes which now shook the church deeply affected him. He beheld with terror the inroads made by the new heresy; and, conscious of his powers, as well as of the sincerity of his zeal, he proceeded to Africa, where he entered into communion with numerous bishops; and while warning them against the arts of the heretics, instructed them on the topics which might be most usefully urged to their confutation. While thus employed, he met with the exiled Pyrrhus, with whom he held a public discussion; and confuting his arguments, induced him to make that retractation which has been mentioned above. He subsequently attended the deposed patriarch to Rome, and took an active part in the councils held there against the Monothelites. At length he was apprehended, and forcibly carried to Constantinople, together with his scholar Anastasius, by order of the patriarch Peter, who then ruled the eastern church. There he was strictly examined as to his opinions, and required to give his assent to the Type: but he firmly resisted both threats and persuasions; and when told that many eminent persons had signed that

instrument, replied, that the Holy Spirit had anathematised, by the mouth of St. Paul, even the angels, should they teach any other doctrine than that which had been at first taught in the church.

He was banished into Thrace, and exposed to the most absolute want of all the comforts, and almost of all the necessaries, of life. But his enemies were still unsatisfied; and both he and Anastasius, with another confessor of the same name, were again obliged to undergo the ordeal of an examination before the council at Constantinople. The process ended in their second condemnation; and in passing sentence, the judges availed themselves of their situation to denounce the opinions of their victims as not only erroneous, but as necessarily connected with the deepest guilt. "After having judged you according to the canons," said they, "it remains for you to suffer the punishment which the laws assign to your impieties, impossible as it is to find a penalty adequate to your guilt. But leaving it to the Almighty Judge to inflict upon you the greatest punishment, we soften for you the severity of the laws, by sparing your lives; decreeing that the prefect, who is here present, lead you forth into his hall, and there, having scourged you with the sinews of an ox, cut out from the roots your tongues, which have been the instruments of your impieties, and sever your right hands, which have enabled you to write them. This part of your sentence being completed, we further ordain that you be led round the four quarters of the city, and then banished, and condemned to a perpetual imprisonment, in which you may lament your crimes during the remainder of your lives."

The execution of this barbarous sentence commenced as soon as it was passed. Having been scourged by the prefect, their tongues were cut out, their right hands dissevered, and in this mutilated condition they were paraded, without mercy, through the streets of the city. In their exile they were not merely denied any allowance to support existence, but were deprived of the few little

necessaries they possessed themselves. Death, however, speedily came to their relief ; and they fell martyrs to a cruelty far worse than that which at once puts a period to the sufferings of its victims.

Happily for the church, and for mankind, the furious zeal which had ministered weapons in this strife, seemed at length to have exhausted itself. Constans, under whom the late barbarities had been perpetrated, died an exile in Sicily. The method he had taken to preserve his authority, by the assassination of his brother, proved, by the just dispensation of Providence, the cause of his downfall. Theodosius had been first obliged to take upon himself the office of a deacon. In the exercise of his functions he had administered the sacred elements of the communion to his imperial brother ; and soon after fell, by his orders, beneath the dagger of the assassin. The recollection of his crime was rendered doubly dreadful to Constans, by the circumstance of his having participated in the sacrament from the hands of his murdered brother ; and his imagination was continually haunted, it is said, by the form of Theodosius, exclaiming, as it pursued him, “ Drink, brother, drink.” He was himself killed by one of his attendants while bathing, and his son Constantine Pogonatus took possession of the throne. Whatever were the faults of this monarch, he had sufficient penetration to discern the necessity of settling, if possible, the fatal dispute which had so long agitated the church. In the month of August, therefore, 678, he addressed a letter to the pope, declaring his intention of summoning a general council. Agatho, who was then on the pontifical chair, lost no time in assembling the western bishops ; and in a synod, composed of a hundred and twenty-five of the most eminent of the body, the decrees of the persecuted Martin were solemnly discussed and confirmed. Deputies were sent from this meeting to Constantinople, where the general council held its first session on the 9th of November, 680. There were present on this occasion the emperor, with the great officers of state ;

the patriarchs of Constantinople and Antioch ; and the most eminent both of the eastern and western bishops.*

Before the deliberations commenced, the letters were read which had been written by the emperor to the pope, and in which were expressed the hearty desires of that sovereign for the restoration of tranquillity. At their conclusion, the legates, deputed by the late council of the Lateran, rose, and addressed the assembly. It was about forty-six years, they stated, since Sergius and others had promulgated the doctrine that there is but one will and one operation in Jesus Christ. The holy see, they continued, rejected the heresy, and exhorted its supporters to return to the profession of the truth ; but this attempt having been made in vain, it thence became their duty to demand a full explication of the new system. To this Macarius of Antioch replied, in the name of his own church, and that of Constantinople, that the charge was false, and that their predecessors, together with pope Honorius and others, had but defended doctrines set forth in the writings of the fathers. He was called upon to prove the truth of his statement ; and in the eighteen sessions to which the continuance of the council extended, the works of the early theologians, and the various documents which had reference to the question in dispute, were brought forward and carefully examined. With Macarius was George of Constantinople ; but their united talents and authority were insufficient to rebut the arguments brought against the Monothelites. By the several acts of the council, the heads of the party, those who were dead as well as the living, were solemnly anathematised ; in the seventeenth session, a formulary of faith was read to the assembly, and in the next it was received and signed. In this instrument were acknowledged the definitions of the first five general councils, and especially that of the fifth, which was chiefly directed against Origen, Theodorus of Mopsuestia, the writings of Theodoret, and the letter of Ibas. The creeds of Nice and Constantinople were next recited ;

* Du Pin, *Councils in Seventh Century*. Basnage, liv. x. c. 7.

and reference being made to the late proceedings at Rome, it was declared "that there are two natural wills, and two operations in Jesus Christ, in one person, without division, without mixture, and without change; that these two wills are not contrary, but that the human will follows the divine will, and is entirely subject to it." In the last place, every ecclesiastic who should teach any other doctrine is made liable thereby to deposition, and every layman to excommunication.

This summary of the faith, and acts of the council, was signed by the papal legates, the patriarchs of Constantinople, the representatives of the absent archbishops of Thessalonica, Cyprus, and Ravenna, the patriarch of Antioch, just elected to supply the place of the deposed Macarius, and by a hundred and sixty bishops. Before they separated, the emperor enquired if such was their decision, to which an answer was given in the affirmative, together with a prayer for the preservation of the sovereign, and an anathema against Honorius, and the rest of the Monothelites. Constantine, on the other hand, declared that his sole wish in calling the council was to establish peace and unity; in answer to which the bishops read him an address containing high eulogiums on his piety, and concluded by desiring him to sign the definition of faith. A striking testimony was afforded at the breaking up of the assembly to the supremacy of the Roman pontiff. In a letter, to which were affixed the signatures of four patriarchs, of thirty-one metropolitans, and of the deputies of other high dignitaries, he was styled the First Bishop of the Universal Church, and called upon to execute that which was wanting to perfect the great object they had in view.

As the sole intention of this council was to condemn the heresy of the Monothelites, no notice was taken in it of matters of discipline. In the year 692, therefore, Justinian II. saw fit to summon another for the purpose of revising the ecclesiastical laws of his empire. This assembly, as well as the preceding, from having met in the hall of the imperial palace, immediately under the

tower or cupola of the building, received the title of the Council in Trullo ; while, from its being intended as a supplement to the two preceding assemblies, it was called Quinisextum.* A hundred and eight bishops, headed by the four patriarchs of the East, were present on the occasion ; and a hundred and two canons were made, or rather re-established, by their decision. The first of these laws respected the marriage of the clergy, and show the near approach which was now made to its entire prohibition. Thus in the third canon it is declared, that those ecclesiastics who were guilty of marrying a second time should be deposed : that as for those whose second wives were dead, or had left them, they should be permitted to retain their place and dignity, but not to perform any sacred function ; “ they who had their own wounds to heal,” it was said, “ not being in a fit state to bless others.” In respect to those who had married widows, or had married being priests, deacons, or subdeacons, it is ordained that they be for a time suspended, but restored, if they leave their wives ; to which clause, however, it is added, that they are not to be raised to any superior rank.†

A few other articles deserve to be briefly noticed, as throwing light upon the state and manners of the clergy at this period. By the ninth canon, clerks are forbidden to keep taverns or frequent them ; by the tenth, to lend money on usury ; and by the eleventh, from holding any conversation with Jews. In regard to monks, and others devoting themselves to an ascetic life, it is established, that a monk may be received in the tenth year of his age ; that those who desire to become anchorets must have been three years, at least, in a monastery before retiring into solitude ; that hermits are not to be suffered in towns ; and that persons of every kind, even the worst of sinners, may be received into monasteries, the monastic condition being one of penitence. The other statutes chiefly respect local cir-

* Basnage controverts the attempts which have been made to prove that this was not a general council.

† Du Pin. Bibliot. Pat. Councils in VII. cent.

cumstances, and those minute rites which had been engrafted on the simple ordinances of the gospel, and had brought with them corruptions which ever required some new regulation to prevent their overgrowing, like noxious weeds, the innermost courts of the Christian temple.

In the midst of these agitations a new sect arose, which, it appears, professed to have for its object the restoration of pure doctrine by a simple appeal to Scripture. The members of this sect, known by the name of Paulicians, have been very differently regarded by ecclesiastical writers; some contemptuously styling them the promoters of pestilential doctrines, and others regarding them as the favoured objects of an extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit. They have also been confounded with the Manicheans and Gnostics; but their founder, Constantine, an obscure citizen of Mananalis, near Samosata, seems to have been too zealous in the study of the New Testament to have imbued his system with philosophical error. It was not, however, till some time after the origin of this sect that it made any important figure in the affairs of Christendom; and the consideration of its peculiar dogmas may, therefore, be properly deferred to a later portion of this history.

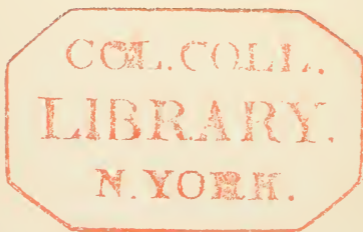
We have now brought down our narrative to that period when circumstances, which have hitherto been contemplated but as contributing to the general current of events, will appear in the more important light of causes; and as forming the foundation of a system, which, by its vastness of application, and the means made use of to support it, gives an importance to ecclesiastical records, as a portion of general history, not inferior to that claimed for the most ambitious of secular annals.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON

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